A SCOUT OF TO-DAY

ABEL · HORNIBROOK

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A SCOUT OF TO-DAY

"WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?"

A
SCOUT OF TO-DAY

BY

ISABEL HORNIBROOK

Author of "Camp and Trail," "Lost in Maine Woods," "Captain Curly's Boy," etc., etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1913

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Published June 1913

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
"NED"

The Author expresses her indebtedness to Edmund Richard Cummins for the song, "THE SCOUTS OF THE U.S.A."

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From drawings by J. Reading

A SCOUT OF TO-DAY

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT WOODS

"WELL! this would be the very day for a long tramp up into the woods. Tooraloo! I feel just in the humor for that."

Colin Estey stretched his well-developed fourteen-year-old body among the tall feathery grasses of the broad salt-marsh whereon he lay, kicking his heels in the September sunshine, and gazed longingly off toward the grand expanse of New England woodland that bordered the marshes and, rising into tree-clad hills, stretched away much farther than the eye could reach in apparently illimitable majesty.

Those woods were the most imposing and mysterious feature in Colin's world. They bounded it in a way. Beyond a certain shallow point in them lay the Unknown, the Woodland Wonder, whereof he had heard much, but which he had never explored for himself. And this reminded him unpleasantly that he was barely fourteen,

in stature measuring five feet three *and* three eighths, facts which never obtruded themselves baldly upon his memory when he romped about the salt-marshes, or rowed a boat — or if no boat was forthcoming, paddled a washtub — on the broad tidal river that wound in and out between the marshes.

Yet though the unprobed mystery of the dense woods vexed him with the feeling of being immature and young — woodland distances look vaster at fourteen than at eighteen — it fascinated him, too, more than did any riddle of the salt-marshes or lunar enigma of the ebb and flow of tide in the silvery, brackish river formed by an arm of sea that coursed inland for many a mile to meet a freshwater stream near the town where Colin was born.

Any daring boy above the age of ten could learn pretty nearly all there was to know about that tidal river: of the mammal and fish wherewith it teemed, from the great harbor seal, once the despot of the river, to the tiny brit that frolicked in the eddies; and about the graceful bird-life that soared above its brackish current.

He could bathe, shrieking with excitement, as wild from delight as any young water-bird, in the foam of the rocky bar where fresh stream and

salt stream met with a great crowing of waters and laughter of spray.

He could imitate the triple whistle, the shrill "Wheu! Wheu! Wheu!" of the greater yellow-legs so cleverly as to beguile that noisy bird, which is said to warn every other feathered thing within hearing, into forgetting its panic and alighting near him.

He could give the drawn-out, plaintive "Ter-lee-ee!" call of the black-breasted plover, and find the crude nest of the spotted sandpiper nestling beneath a tall clump of candle-grass.

All these secrets and many more were within easy reach and could be studied in his unwritten Nature Primer whose pages were traced in the flight of each bird and the spawn of every fish.

But the Heart of the Woods was a closed book to most fourteen-year-old boys born and brought up in the little tidal town of Exmouth.

Colin had often longed to turn the pages of that book — to penetrate farther into the woods than he had dared to do yet. This longing was fanned by the tales of men who had hunted, trapped or felled trees in them, who could spell out each syllable of the woodlore to be studied in their golden twilight; and who, as they roved and read, could put a finger on many a colored

illustration of Nature's methods set against a green background of branches or fluttering underbrush, like the flitting foliage of moving pictures.

To-day the wood-longing possessed Colin so strongly that it actually stung him all over, from his neck to his drumming, purposeless heels.

He glanced up into the brilliant September sky arching the salt-marshes, questioning it as to what might be going on in the woods at this moment under its imperial canopy.

And the blue eye of the sky winked back at him, hinting that it knew of forest secrets to be discovered to-day — of fascinating woodland creatures to be seen for a moment at their whisking gambols.

The sunlight's energy raced through him. The briny ozone of the salt-marshes was a tickling feather in his nostrils, teasing him with a desire to find an outlet for that energy in some new and unprecedented form of activity.

He sprang to his feet, spurning the plumy grass.

"Gee whiz! I'm not going to lie here any longer, smelling marsh-hay," he cried half articulately, his eye taking in the figures of two haymakers who were mowing the tall marsh-grass

and letting it lie in fragrant swathes to dry into the salt hay that forms such juicy fodder for cattle. "It's me for the woods to-day! I want to go farther into those old woods than I've ever gone before — far enough to find Varney's Paintpot and the Bear's Den — and the coon's hole that Toiney Leduc saw among the alders an' ledges near Big Swamp!"

He halted on the first footstep, whistling blithely to a gray-winged yellow-legs that skimmed above his head. The curly, boyish whistle, ascending in spirals, carried the musical challenge aloft: "I'm glad I'm alive and athirst for adventure; are n't you?"

To which the bird's noisy three-syllabled cry responded like three cheers!

"It 's me for the woods to-day!" Colin set off at an easy lope across the marshes. "I 'm going to look up Coombsie and Starrie Chase — and Kenjo Red! Us boys won't have much more time for fun before school reopens!" grammar capsizing in the sudden, boisterous eddy within him.

That eddy of excitement carried him like a feather up an earthy embankment that ascended from the low-lying marshes, over a fence, and out onto the drab highroad which a little farther

on blossomed out into houses on either side and became the quiet main street of Exmouth.

Colin turned his face westward toward the home of "Coombsie," otherwise Mark Coombs —also shortened into "Marcoo" by nickname-loving boydom.

He had not gone far when his loping speed slackened abruptly to a contemplative trot. The trot sobered down to a crestfallen walk. The walk dwindled into a halt right in the middle of the sunny road.

"Tooraloo! here comes Coombsie now," he ejaculated behind his twitching lips. "And some one with him! Oh, I forgot all about that!" Dismay stole over his face at the thought. "Of course it's the strange boy, Marcoo's cousin, who came from Philadelphia yesterday and is going to stay here for ever so long — six months or so — while his parents travel in Europe. This spoils our fun. Probably *he* won't want to start off on a long hike through the woods," rigidly scanning the approaching stranger as a stiffened terrier might size up a dog of a different breed. "His folks are rich, so Marcoo said; I suppose he's been brought up in a city flowerpot— and is n't much of a fellow anyhow!" with a disgruntled grin.

But as the oncoming pair drew within twenty yards of the youthful critic the latter's tense face-muscles relaxed. Reassurance crept into his expression.

"Gee! he looks all right, this city boy. He's not dolled-up much anyway! And he does n't look 'Willified' either!" was Colin's complacent comment.

No, the stranger's dress was certainly not patterned after the fashion of the boy-doll which Colin Estey had seen simpering in store-windows. He wore a khaki shirt stained with service, rough tweed knickerbockers and a soft broad-brimmed hat. He carried his coat; the ends of his blue necktie dangled outside his shirt, one was looped up into a careless knot. His gray eye was rather more than usually alert and bright, his general appearance certainly not suggestive of a flowerpot plant; his step, quick and springy, embodied the saline breeze that skipped over the salt-marshes.

So much Colin took in before criticism was blown out of his mind by a shout from Coombsie.

"Hullo! Col," exclaimed Marcoo. "Say, this is fine! We were just starting off to hunt you up — Nix and I! This is my cousin, Nixon Warren, who popped up here from Philadelphia

late last night. Nix, this is my chum, Colin Estey!"

The two boys acknowledged the introduction with gruff shyness.

"Nixon and I settled on going down the river to-day in Captain Andy's power-boat, and Mother put us up a corking good luncheon," Marcoo significantly swung a basket pendant from his right hand. "But we've just been talking to Captain Andy," glancing backward over his shoulder at the receding figure of an elderly man who limped as he walked, "and he says he can't take us to-day. He won't even loan us the Pill." Coombsie gesticulated with the basket toward the broad tidal river gleaming in the sunshine, on which rode a trim gasolene launch with a little rowboat, so tubby that it was almost round and aptly named the Pill, lying as tender beside it.

"Pshaw! the Pill isn't much of a boat. One might as well put to sea in a shoebox!" Colin chuckled.

"I know! Well, we can't go on the river anyhow, so we've determined to take the basket along and spend the whole day in the woods. Nix is —"

"Great O!" whooped Colin, breaking in.

"That 's what I 've been planning on doing too. I want to go *far* into the woods to-day," — his hands doubled and opened excitedly, as if grasping at something hitherto out of reach, — "farther than I 've ever been before, — far enough to see Varney's Paintpot and the old Bear's Den — and some of the other wonders that the men tell about!"

"But there are n't any bears in these Massachusetts woods now?" It was the strange boy, Nixon Warren, who eagerly spoke.

"Not that we know of!" Coombsie answered. "If one should stray over the border from New Hampshire he manages to lie low. Apparently there 's nothing bigger than a deer traveling in our woods to-day — together with foxes in plenty and an occasional coon. The last bear seen in this region, Nix, had his den in the cave of a great rock in the thickest part o' the woods. He was such an everlasting nuisance, killing calves and lambs, that a hunter tracked him into the cave and killed him with his knife. Ever since it has been called the Bear's Den. I 've never seen it; nor you, Col!"

"No, but Starrie Chase has! I was going to hunt him up too, and Kenjo Red: they 're a team if you want to go into the woods; they

know more about them than any other boy in Exmouth."

"Kenjo has gone to Salem to-day. And Leon Chase?" Coombsie's expression was doubtful. "I guess Leon makes a bluff of knowing the woods better than he does. He'll scare everything away with his dog and shotgun. Captain Andy is hunting for him now," with another backward glance to where the massive figure of the old sea-captain was melting from view. "He's threatening to shake Starrie until his heels change places with his head for fixing the Doctor's doorbell last night, wedging a pin into it so that it kept on ringing until the electricity gave out — and for teasing old Ma'am Baldwin again."

"'Mom Baldwin,' who lives in that old bald-faced house 'way over on the salt-marshes!" Colin hooted. "Pshaw! she ought to wash her clothes at the Witch Rock, where Dark Tammy was made to wash hers, over a hundred years ago. I guess Leon knows the way to Varney's Paintpot anyhow," he advanced clinchingly.

"What sort of queer Paintpot is that?" Nixon Warren spoke; his stranger's part in the conversation was limited to putting excited questions.

"It's a red-ochre swamp — a bed of moist red

clay — that's hidden somewhere in the woods," Colin explained. "The Indians used it for making paint. So did the farmers, hereabouts, until a few years ago. I believe it's mostly dried up now."

"Whoopee! if we could only find it, we might paint ourselves to our waists, make believe we were Indians and go yelling through the woods!" Nixon's eye sparkled like sun-touched granite, and Colin parted with the last lingering suspicion of his being a flowerpot fellow.

This suggestion settled it. Starrie Chase, otherwise Leon, might let his boyish energy leak off as waste steam in planting another thorn in the side of the hard-worked doctor who bore the burdens of half the community, and in persecuting lonely old women, but — he was supposed to know the way to Varney's Paintpot!

And the three started along the road to find him.

The quest did not lead them far. Rounding a bend in the highroad, they came abruptly upon Leon Starr Chase, familiarly called Starrie, almost a fifteen-year-old boy, of Nixon's age.

He was leaning against a low fence above the marshes, holding a dead bird high above the head of a very lively fox-terrier whose tan ears

gesticulated like tiny signal flags as he jumped into the air to capture it, with a short one-syllabled bark.

"Ha! *you* can't catch it, Blink — and you shan't have it till you do," teased his master, lowering its limp yellow legs a little.

The dog's nose touched them. The next instant he had the bird in his mouth.

With equal swiftness he dropped it on the sidewalk, growling and gagging at the warm feathers which almost choked him. "Ugh-r-r!" He spurned it with his black nose along the ground, the tiny yellow claws raking up minute spirals of dust.

"There! I knew you would n't eat it," remarked his master indifferently. "You're a spoiled pup!" Simultaneously Leon caught sight of the three boys making toward him and burst into a complacent shout of recognition.

"Hullo, Colin! Hullo, Coombsie!" he cried. "See what I've got! Six *yellow-legs!* I fired into a flock; the first I've seen this year. They were going from me and I dropped half a dozen of them together, with this old 'fuzzee'!" He touched an ancient shotgun propped beside him. "I've shot quite a number one at a time this week."

His left hand went out to a huddle of still quivering feathers on top of the fence in which five pairs of yellow spindle-legs were tangled like slim twigs.

Colin, as was expected of him, burst into an exclamation of wonder at this destructive skill. Coombsie's admiration was more forced.

Blink, the terrier, scornfully rolled over the feathered thing in the dust. He snapped angrily at the stranger, Nixon Warren, who tried to pick it up and examine it.

"That bird won't be fit to eat now, after the dog has played with it," suggested the latter, addressing Leon without the benefit of an introduction.

"I don't care. Probably I'll give the whole bunch of yellow-legs away, anyhow — Mother does n't like their sedgy flavor. She 'd rather I 'd let the birds alone, I guess!"

"Why do you shoot so many if you don't want them?"

"Oh! partly for the sport and partly because these 'Greater Yellow-legs' are such telltales that they warn every duck and other bird within hearing by their noisy whistle."

Impulsively Nixon put out a finger and touched one slim leg with its limp claw that protruded

from the fence. At the same moment he glanced upward.

Over the boys' heads, having just risen from the feathery marshes, skimmed a feathered telltale, live counterpart of the one he touched, its legs golden spindles in the sunshine, its shrill joy-whistle: "Wheu! Wheu! *Whe-eu!*" proclaiming the thanksgiving which had rioted through Colin's mind on the fragrant salt-marshes: "Glad I'm alive! Glad I'm alive! *Glad* — I'm alive!"

A smothered exclamation broke from Coombsie as he followed the finger and the flight.

Leon snatched up the gun.

"One can't have too much of a good thing: I guess I could drop that 'telltale,' too!"

But Marcoo's hand fastened upon his arm with an impulsive cry.

"Eh! What's the matter with you — Flutterbudget?" Lowering the pointed shotgun, Leon whisked round; his restless brown eyes had a lightning trick of shutting and opening, as if he were taking a photograph of the person addressed, which was in general highly disconcerting to the boy who differed from him. "No need to make a fuss! I would n't let her off here, anyhow," he added, fondling the gun. "Father

would be fined if I should fire a shot on the high-road."

"*We're* starting off on a hike — for a long tramp into the woods, Leon," began Coombsie hurriedly, anxious to create a diversion. "We want you to come with us, as leader; Colin says that *you* know the way to Varney's Paintpot!"

The other's expression changed like a rocket: Starrie Chase enjoyed leading other boys, even more than he reveled in "popping yellow-legs" — for the former Nature had intended him.

"All right!" he responded with swift eagerness. "Just, you fellows, keep an eye on my gun while I run home with the birds; I'll be back in a minute!"

"Oh! you're not going to take your gun into the woods?"

"Sure — I am! I might get a chance at a fox!"

"Won't it be an awful nuisance carrying it all the way through the thick undergrowth — we want to go as far into the woods as the Bear's Den?" suggested Marcoo tactfully.

"Well, perhaps it would. I'll just scoot home then, and be back in no time!"

He snatched the dead birds from the fence, raced away and reappeared in three minutes, with the terrier barking at his heels.

"I'm going to let Blink come anyhow; he'll have a great time chasing things — eh, Blinkie?" Leon made a hurdle of his outstretched arm for the scampering dog to jump over it.

And the terrier replied in a volley of excited barks, saying in doggy talk: "Fellows! if there's fun ahead, I'm in with you. The woods are a grand old playground!"

He led the way, and the four boys followed, jostling each other merrily, rubbing their high spirits together and bringing sparks from the contact — bound for that mysterious forest Paintpot.

But the stranger, Nixon Warren, could not forbear throwing one backward glance from under his wide-brimmed hat at the poor dog-scorned yellow-legs, its joy-whistle silenced, stiffening in the dust.

CHAPTER II

ONLY A CHIP'

"Oh! I wish I had worn my tramping togs," exclaimed Nixon Warren as the four boys, after covering an easy mile along the highroad and over the uplands that lay between marsh and woodland, plunged, whooping, in amid the forest shadows roofed by the meeting branches of pines, hemlocks, oaks, and birches, with here and there a maple already turning ruddy, that formed the outposts of the dense woods.

A dwarf counterpart of the same trees laced with vines and prickly brambles made an undergrowth so thick that they parted with shreds of their clothing as they went threshing through it, in a fascinating gold-misted twilight, through which the slender sunbeams flashed like fairy knitting-needles weaving a scarf of light and shade around each tall trunk.

"Why! you're better 'togged' for the woods than the rest of us are," answered Leon Starr Chase, looking askance at the new boy. "That's a dandy hat; must shade your eyes a whole lot

when you're tramping on open ground! I guess ours don't need any shading!"

A wandering sunbeam kindled a brassy spark in Leon's brown eye which looked as if it could face anything unabashed. In his mind lurked the same suspicion that had hovered over Colin's at first sight of Nixon, that this newcomer from a distant city might be somewhat of a flowerpot fellow, delicately reared and coddled, not a hardy plant that could revel and rough it in the wilderness atmosphere of the thick woods.

Nothing about the boy-stranger supported such an idea for a moment, except to Leon, as the party progressed, the interest which he took in the floral life of the woodland: in objects which Starrie Chase who invariably "hit the woods" as he phrased it, with destruction in the forefront of his thoughts, generally overlooked, and therefore did not consider worth a second glance.

He stood and gaped as Nixon, with a shout of delight, pounced upon some rosy pepper-grass, stooped to pick a wood aster or gentian, or pointed out to Coombsie the green sarsaparilla plant flaunting and prolific between the trees.

"What do you call this, Marcoo?" the strange boy would exclaim delightedly, finding novel treasure trove in the rare white blossoms of

Labrador tea. "I don't remember to have seen this flower on any of our hikes through the Pennsylvania woods!"

To which Coombsie would make answer: —

"Don't ask me, Nix; I know a litttle about birds, but when it comes to knowing anything of flowers or plants — excepting those that are under our feet every day — I 'fall down flunk!' Hullo! though, here are some devil's pitchforks — or stick-tight — I do know them!"

"So do I!" Nixon stooped over the tall bristly flower-heads, rusty green in color, and gathered a few of the two-pronged seed-vessels that cling so readily to the fur of an animal or the clothing of a boy. "It's funny to think how they have to depend upon some passing animal to propagate the seeds. Say! but they do stick tight, don't they?" And he slyly slipped a few of the russet pitchforks inside Leon's collar — whereupon a whooping scuffle ensued.

"It looks to me as if *some* lightfooted animal were in the habit of passing here that might carry the seeds along," said the perpetrator of the prank presently, dropping upon his hands and knees to examine breathlessly the leaves and brambles pressed down into a trail so light that it seemed the mere shadow of a pathway leading

off into the woods at right angles from where the boys stood.

"You're right. It's a fox-path!" Leon was examining the shadow-tracks too. "A fox trots along here to his hunting-ground where he catches shrews an' mice or grasshoppers even, when he can't get hold of a plump quail or partridge. Whew! I wish I'd brought my gun."

Dead silence for two minutes, while each ear was intently strained to catch the sound of a sly footfall and heard nothing but the noisy shrilling of the cicada, or seventeen-year locust, with the pipe of kindred insects.

"Look! there's been a partridge at work here," cried Nixon by and by, when the still game was over and the boys were forging ahead again.

He pointed to a decayed log whose flaky wood, garnished here and there with a tiny buff feather, was mostly pecked away and reduced to brown powder by the busy bird which had wallowed there.

"He's been trying to get at some insects in the wood. See how he has dusted it all up with his claws an' feathers!" went on the excited speaker. "Oh — but I tell you what makes you feel happy!" He drew a long breath, turning suddenly, impulsively, to the boys behind him.

"It 's when you 're out on a hike an' a partridge rises right in front of you — and you hear his wings sing!"

Colin and Coombsie stared. The strange boy's look flashed with such frank gladness, doubled and trebled by sharing sympathetically, in so far as he could, each bounding thrill that animated the wild, free life about him! They had often been moved by the liquid notes from a songster's throat, but had not come enough into loving touch with Nature to hear music in a bird's wings.

If Leon had heard it, his one idea would have been to silence it with a shot. He stood still in his tracks, bristling like his dog.

"Ughr-r! 'Singing wings'!" he sneered. "Aw! take that talk home to Mamma."

"Say that once again, and I'll lick you!" The stranger's gaze became, now, very straight and inviting from under his broad-brimmed hat.

The atmosphere felt highly charged — unpleasantly so for the other two boys. But at that critical moment an extraordinary sound of other singing — human singing — was borne to them in faint merriment upon the woodland breeze, so primitive, so unlike anything modern, that it might have been Robin Hood himself or one of his green-coated Merry Men singing a roundelay

in the woods to the accompaniment of a wood-chopper's axe.

"Rond! Rond! Rond! peti' pie pon' ton'!
Rond! rond! rond! peti' pie pon' ton'!"

"*What is it?* Who is — it?" Nixon's stiffening fists unclosed. His eye was bright with bewilderment.

"Houp-la! it's Toiney — Toiney Leduc." Colin broke into an exultant whoop. "Now we'll have fun! Toiney is a funny one, for sure!"

"He's more fun than a circus," corroborated Coombsie. "We're coming to a little farm-clearing in the woods now, Nix," he explained, falling in by his cousin's side as the four boys moved hastily ahead, challenges forgotten. "There's a house on it, the last for miles. It's owned by a man called Greer, and Toiney Leduc works for him during the summer an' fall. Toiney is a French-Canadian who came here about a year ago; his brother is employed in one of the ship-building yards on the river."

The merry, oft-repeated strain came to them more distinctly now, rolling among the trees: —

"Rond, rond, rond, peti' pie pon' ton'!
C'éta't une bonne femme,
Qui garda't sex moutons,
Rond', rond', rond, peti' pie pon' ton'!"

"He 's singing about the woman who was taking care of her sheep and how the lamb got his chin in the milk! He translated it for me," said Colin.

"'Translate!' He does n't know enough English to say 'Boo!' straight," threw back Leon, as he gained the edge of the clearing. "It is Toiney!" he cried exultingly. "Toiney — and the *Hare!*"

"The — what? My word! there are surprises enough in these woods — what with forest paint-pots — and the rest." Nixon, as he spoke, was bounding out into the open too, thrilled by expectation: a musical woodchopper attended by a tame rodent would certainly be a unique item upon the forest playbill which promised a variety of attractions already.

But he saw no skipping hare upon the green patch of clearing — nothing but a boy of twelve whose full forehead and pointed face was very slightly rodent-like in shape, but whose eyes, which at this startled moment showed little save their whites, were as shy and frightened as a rabbit's, while he shrank close to Toiney's side.

"My brother says that whenever he sees that boy he feels like offering him a bunch of clover or a lettuce leaf!" laughed Leon, repeating the

thoughtless speech of an adult. He stooped suddenly, picked some of the shaded clover leaves and a pink blossom: "Eh! want some clover, 'Hare'?" he asked teasingly, thrusting the green stuff close to the face of the abnormally frightened boy.

The hapless, human Hare sought to efface himself behind Toiney's back. And the woodchopper began to execute an excited war-dance, flourishing the axe wherewith he had been musically felling a young birch tree for fuel.

"Ha! you Leon, you *coquin*, *gamin* — rogue — you 'll say dat one time more, den I go lick you, me!" he cried in his imperfect English eked out with indignant French.

"No, you won't go lick me — you!" Nevertheless Starrie Chase and his mocking face retreated a little; he had no fancy for tackling Toiney and the axe.

"That boy's name is Harold Greer; it 's too bad about him," Coombsie was whispering in Nix Warren's ear. "The doctor says he 's 'all there,' nothing wrong with him mentally. But he was born frightened — abnormally timid — and he seems to get worse instead o' better. He 's afraid of everything, of his own shadow, I think, and more still of the shadows of others: I mean

he 's so shy that he won't speak to anybody — if he can help it — except his grandfather and Toiney and the old woman who keeps house for them."

Nixon looked pityingly at the boy who lived thus in his own shadow — the shadow of a baseless fear.

"Whew! it must be bad to be born scared!" he gasped. "I wish we could get Toiney to sing some more."

At this moment there came a wild shout from Colin who had been exploring the clearing and stumbled upon something near the outhouses.

"Gracious! what is it — a wildcat?" he cried. "It is n't a fox — though it has a bushy tail! It 's as big as half a dozen squirrels. Hulloo-oo!" in yelling excitement, "it must be a coon — a young coon."

There was a general stampede for the henhouse, amid the squawking cackle of its rightful inhabitants.

Toiney followed, so did the human Hare, keeping always behind his back and casting nervous glances in Leon's direction.

"Ha! *le petit raton* — de littal coon!" gasped the woodchopper. "W'en I go on top of henhouse dis morning w'at you t'ink I fin' dere, engh? I fin' heem littal coon! I 'll t'ink he kill

two, t'ree poulets — littal chick!" gesticulating fiercely at the dead marauder and at the bodies of some slain chickens. "Dog he kill heem; but, *sapré!* he fight lak *diable!* Engh?"

The last exclamation was a grunt of inquiry as to whether the boys understood how that young raccoon, about two-thirds grown, had fought. Toiney shruggingly rubbed his hands on his blue shirt-sleeves while he pointed to a mongrel dog, the other participant in that early-morning battle, with whom Leon's terrier had been exchanging canine courtesies.

Blink forsook his scarred brother now and sniffed eagerly at the coon's dead body as he had sniffed at the poor yellow-legs in the dust.

"Where did he come from, Toiney? Do you suppose he strayed from the coon's hole that you found in the woods, among some ledges near Big Swamp?" Colin, together with the other boys, was stooping down to examine the dead body of the wild animal which measured nearly a foot and a half from the tip of its sharp nose to the beginning of the bushy tail that was handsomely ringed with black and a shading buff-color.

"Yaas, he'll com' out f'om de forêt — f'om among heem beeg tree." Toiney Leduc, letting

his axe fall to the ground, waved an eloquent right arm in its flannel shirt-sleeve toward the woods beyond the clearing.

"Is n't his fur long and thick — more like coarse gray hair than fur?" Nixon stroked the raccoon's shaggy coat.

"Tell us how to find those ledges where the hole is? There may be some live ones in it. I'd give anything to see a live coon," urged Coombsie.

"Ah! la! la! You no fin' dat ledge en dat swamp. Eet 's littal black in dere, in gran' forêt — in dem big ole hood," came the dissuading answer.

"He always says 'hood' for 'wood,'" explained Marcoo *sotto voce.*

"Ciel! w'en you go for fin' dat hole, dat 's de time you get los' — engh?" urged Toiney, suddenly very earnest. "You walkee, walkee — lak wit' eye shut — den you haf so tire' en so lonesam' you go — *deaded.*"

He flung out his hands with an eloquent gesture of blind despair upon the last word, which shot a warning thrill to the boys' hearts. Three of them looked rather apprehensively toward the dense woods that stretched away interminably beyond the clearing.

But the fourth, Leon, was not to be intimidated by anything short of Toiney brandishing the woodchopper's axe.

He paused in his gesture of slyly offering more clover to the boy with the frightened eyes.

"Oh! I know the woods pretty well, Toiney," he said. "I've been far into them with my father. I can find the way to Big Swamp."

"I'll bet me you' head you get los'—hein?"

"Why don't you bet your own seal-head, Toiney? You can't say 'Boo!' straight." Leon scathingly pointed to the Canadian's bare, closely cropped head, dark and shiny as sealskin.

"*Sapré!* I'll no bet yous head—you Leon—for nobodee want heem, axcep' for play ping-pong," screamed the enraged Toiney.

There was a general mirthful roar. Leon reddened.

"Oh, come; let's 'beat it'!" he cried. "We'll never find that coon's burrow, or anything else, if we stand here chattering with a Canuck. Look at Blink! He's after something on the edge of the woods. A red squirrel, I think!"

He set off in the wake of the terrier, and his companions followed, disregarding further protests in Toiney's ragged English.

Once more they were immersed in the woods

beyond the clearing. The terrier was barking furiously up a pine tree, on whose lowest branch sat the squirrel getting off an angry patter of "Quek-Quik! Quek-quek-quek-quik!" punctuated with shrill little cries.

"Hear him chittering an' chattering! There 's some fire to that conversation. See! the squirrel looks all red mouth," laughed Nixon.

The mouth of the little tree-climbing fury yawned, indeed, like a tiny coral cave decorated with minute ivories as he sat bolt upright on the dry branch, scolding the dog.

"Oh! come on, Blink, you can't get at him. You can chase a woodchuck or something else that is n't quite so quick, and kill it!" cried his master.

The "something else" was presently started in the form of a little chipmunk, ground brother to the squirrel, which had been holding solitary revel with a sunbeam on a rock.

With a frightened flick of its gold-brown tail it sought shelter in a cleft of a low, natural wall where some large stones were piled one upon another.

Instantly it discovered that this shallow refuge offered no sure shelter from the dog following hot upon its trail. Forth it popped again, with a

plaintive, chirping "Chip! Chip! Chir-r-r!" of extreme terror and fled, like a tuft of fur wafted by the breeze, to its real fortress, the deep, narrow hole which it had tunneled in under a rock, and which it was so shy of revealing to strangers that it would never have sought shelter there save in dire extremity.

It was such a very small hole as regards the round entrance through which the chipmunk had squeezed, which did not measure three inches in circumference — and such a touchingly neat little hole, for there was no trace of the earth which the little creature had scattered in burrowing it — that it might well have moved any heart to pity.

The terrier finding himself baffled, sat down before it, and pointed his ears at his master, inquiring about the prospects of a successful siege.

"He was too quick for you that time, Blinkie. But you'll get another chance at him, pup," guaranteed Leon, while his companions were endeavoring to solve the riddle — one of the minor charming mysteries of the woods — namely, what the ground-squirrel does with the earth which he scatters in tunneling his grass-fringed hole.

No such marvel appealed to Leon Chase!

With lightning rapidity he was wrenching a thin, rodlike stick from a near-by white birch, and tearing the leaves off. Before one of the other boys could stop him, he had inserted this as a long probe in the hole, working the cruel goad ruthlessly from side to side, scattering earth enough now and torn grass on either side of the spic-and-span entrance.

"Ha! you have n't seen the last of him, Blink!" he cried. "I'll soon 'podge' him out of that! This hole runs in under a rock; so there can't be a sharp turn in it, as is the case with the chipsquirrel's hole generally! I guess I can reach him with the stick; then he'll be so frightened that he'll pop out right in your face," forming a quick deduction that did credit to his powers of observation and made it seem a bruising pity as well for persecutor as persecuted that such boyish ingenuity should be turned to miserable ends.

Leon's eyes were beady with malicious triumph. His breath came in short excited puffs. So did the terrier's. It boded ill for the tormented chipmunk cowering at the farthest end of the desecrated hole.

"Hullo! that 's two against one and it is n't fair play. *Quit it!*" suddenly burst forth a ringing boyish voice. "The chip' was faster than the

dog — he ought to have an even chance for his life, anyhow!"

Leon, crouching by the hole, looked up in petrified amazement. It was Nixon Warren, the stranger to these woods, who spoke. The tormentor broke into an insulting laugh.

"Eh — what's the matter with *you*, Chicken-heart?" he sneered. "None o' your business whether it's fair or not!"

A flash leaped from the gray eyes under Nixon's broad hat that defied the sneer applied to him. His chest heaved under the Khaki shirt with whose metal buttons a sunbeam played winsomely, while with defiant vehemence Leon worked his probing stick deeper, deeper into the hole where the mite of a chipmunk shrank before the cruel goad that would ultimately force it forth to meet the whirlwind of the dog's attack.

Colin and Coombsie held their breath, feeling as if they could see the trembling "chipping" fugitive pressed against the farthest wall of its enlarged retreat.

Another minute, and out it must pop to death.

But upon the dragging, prodding seconds of that minute broke again the voice of the chipmunk's champion — hot and ringing.

"*Quit that!*" it exploded. "Stop wiggling the stick in the hole — or I'll make you!"

"You 'll make me, eh? Oh! run along home to Mamma — that 's where your place is!" But right upon the heels of the sneer a sharp question rushed from Leon's lips: "Who are you — anyhow — to tell me to stop?"

And the tall trees bowed their noble heads, the grasses ceased their whispering, even the seventeen-year locust, shrilling in the distance, seemed to suspend its piping note to listen to the answer that rushed bravely forth: —

"I'm a Boy Scout! A Boy Scout of America! I've promised to do a good turn to somebody — or something — every day. I'm going to do it to that chipmunk! Stop working that stick in the hole!"

"Gee whiz! I thought there was something queer about you from the first."

The mouth of Starrie Chase yawned until it rivaled the enlarged hole. Sitting on his heels, his cruel probing momentarily suspended, he gazed up, as at a newfangled sort of animal, at this daring Boy Scout of America — this Scout of the U.S.A.

CHAPTER III

RACCOON JUNIOR

"SCOUT or no scout, you are not going to boss me!"

Thus Starrie Chase broke the breathless silence that reigned for half a minute in the woods, following upon Nixon's declaration that he was a boy scout, bound by the scout law to protect the weak among human beings and animals.

For the space of that half-minute the tormenting stick had ceased to probe the hole. The wretched chipmunk, cowering in the farthest corner of its once neat retreat, had a respite.

But Leon — who was not inherently cruel so much as thoughtlessly teasing and the victim of a destructive habit of mind, now felt that should he yield a point to this fifteen-year-old lad from a distant city, the leadership which he so prized, among the boys of Exmouth, would be endangered. He was the recognized head of a certain youthful male gang, of which Colin and Coombsie — though the latter occasionally deplored his methods — were leading representatives.

"Go ahead, scout, prevent my doing anything I want to do — if you can!" he flung out, his brown eyes winking upward with that snapshot quickness as if he were photographing on their retina the figure of that new species of animal, the scout of the U.S.A. "I've heard of your kind before; you know a lot of things that nobody else knows — or wants to know either!"

The last words were to the accompaniment of the goading stick which began to move vehemently to and fro in the hole again. That neat little hole, which had been one of the humbler miracles of the woods, now gaped as an ugly, torn fissure beneath its roof of rock.

Before it was a defacing débris of torn grass and earth in which Blink scratched impatiently, whining over the delay in the chip-squirrel's exit.

"Oh! give it up, Leon; I believe I can hear him stirring in the hole!" pleaded Colin Estey.

Simultaneously the scout flung himself on his knees before the chipmunk's fortress, well-nigh captured, and seized the cruel goad.

"Let go of this stick or I'll lick you with it! I can; I'm as old — older than you are!" Leon was now a red-eyed savage.

"That would be like your notion of fair play!

Oh! drop the stick an' come on with your fists! I'm not afraid of you."

The probable result of such a duel remains a problem; any slight advantage in age was on Leon's side, but each alert movement of the boy scout showed that he possessed eye, mind, and muscle trained to the fullest to cope with any situation that might arise. Whoever might prove victor, the expedition to Varney's Paintpot would have been abruptly frustrated by a fight among the exploring party, had not Marcoo the tactful interfered.

"Oh! what's the use of fighting about a chip'?" he cried, thrusting a plump shoulder between the bristling combatants. "It's just this way, Leon: Nix is right; it's a mean business, trying to force that chipmunk out of its hole for the dog to catch it! You can withdraw the stick right now, come with us an' share our luncheon; or you can go off on your own hook — and you don't get a crumb out of the basket — we'll find the Paintpot without you!"

Leon drew a long wavering breath, looking at Colin for support.

But Public Opinion as represented by the two younger boys, was by this time entirely with the scout. For it is the genius among boys, as among

grown-ups, who voices what lies hidden and unexpressed, in the hearts of others; we are always moved by the bold utterance of that which we have surreptitiously felt ourselves.

Both Colin Estey and Marcoo had known what it was to feel their sense of pity and justice outraged by Leon's persecuting methods. But it needed the trained boldness of the boy scout to put the sentiment into words; to be ready to fight for his knightly principles and win. For he had won.

Leon Chase fairly writhed at the choice set before him — at the necessity of yielding a point to the stranger! But he felt that it would be still more obnoxious to his feelings to be deserted by his companions, left to beat a solitary retreat homeward with his dog or wander — alone and fasting — through the woods, a boy hermit!

"All right! Have your way! Come along," he cried crossly. "We'll never get anywhere — that's sure — if we waste any more time on a chipmunk!"

Withdrawing the stick from the enlarged aperture, he flung it away and scrambled to his feet, whistling to the dog.

It needed much moral suasion on the part of all four boys to lure the terrier away from the

raided hole with whose earth his slim white legs were coated. But he presently consented to explore the woods further in search of diversion.

And the incident ended without any torn fur flying its flag of pain on the summer air.

The flag of feud between the two boys, Starrie Chase and Nixon, was not, however, immediately lowered. Coombsie — a studious, thoughtful lad — had the unhappy feeling of having brought two strange fires together which might at any moment result in an explosion that would be especially disastrous on this the first day of his cousin's visit to him.

But as one lad has remarked: "Two boys cannot remain mad with each other long: there 's always too much doing!"

And everybody knows that sawdust smothers smouldering fire! It did in this instance. After about ten minutes of "grouchy" but uneventful tramping, the forest explorers came to a logging camp, a rude shanty, flanked by a yellow mountain of sawdust where a portable sawmill had been set up during the preceding winter and taken down in spring.

In spite of the fact that so much lay before them to be seen in the woods — if haply they

might arrive at the various points of heart's desire — it was not in boy-nature to refrain from scaling that unstable, shelving sawdust peak for a better view onward into those shadowy woods. And a lusty sham battle ensued, in the midst of which Leon found occasion to repay the trick played on him with the pitchfork seeds by slipping a handful of sawdust inside the scout's khaki collar.

"Whew! that's worse than the devil's pitchforks," groaned the latter, writhing and squirming in his tan shirt.

But does not a trifling discomfort under such circumstances enhance while curbing the enjoyment of a boy, tying him to earth, when his young spirit like an aeroplane, winged with sheer joy of life and youthful daring, feels as if it could spurn that earth sphere as too limited, and, riding on the breeze of heaven, seek adventure among the clouds?

In such a mood the four boys, drinking in the odor of the pine-trees as a fillip to delight, were presently exploring the loggers' shanty, with its rude bunks, oilcloth-covered table, here an old magazine, there a worn-out stocking, relics of human habitation.

"Nobody occupies this camp during the sum-

mer," said Leon. "I think Toiney Leduc and another man worked up here last winter."

"I'm pretty sure that Toiney did! Look there!" The scout was unfolding a piece of charred paper pinioned in a corner by a tomato can; it was a printed fragment of a French-Canadian *voyageur* song, at sight of which the boys made the shanty ring with: —

"Rond! rond! rond! peti' pie pon' ton'!"

"But I'm not so sure that nobody is using the shanty now," remarked Nixon presently. "See that tobacco ash and the stains on the white oilcloth!" pointing to the dingy table. "Both look fresh; the ash could n't possibly have remained here since last winter; 't would have been blown away long ago by the wind sweeping through the open shanty. There 's some more of it on the mattress in this bunk," drawing himself up to look over the side of the rude crib built into the wall. "I guess somebody *does* occupy the camp now — at night anyway!"

"Oh! so you set up to be a sort of Sherlock Holmes, do you?" jeered Leon.

"I don't set up to be anything! But I can tell that the men ground their axes right here." The scout was now kicking over a small wooden

trough that had reposed, bottom uppermost, amid the long grass before the shanty.

"How can you make that out?" It was Colin who spoke.

"Because, look! there's rust on the inside of the trough, showing that there are steely particles mixed with the dust of the interior and that water has dripped into it from the revolving grindstone."

"Pshaw! anybody could find that out who set to work to think about it," came in a chorus from his three companions.

But that "thinking" was just the point: the others would have passed by that topsy-turvy wooden vessel, which might have been used for sundry purposes, with its dusty interior exactly the hue of the yellow sawdust, without stopping to reason out the story of the patient axe-grinding which had gone on there during winter's bitter days.

"But, I say, what good does it do you to find out things like that?" questioned Starrie Chase, kicking over the trough, his shrewd young face a star of speculation. "If one should go about poking his nose into everything that had happened, why! he'd find stories in most things, I guess! The woods would be full of them."

"So they are!" replied the scout quickly. "That 's just what we 're taught: that every bird and animal, as well as everything which is done by men, leaves its 'sign!' We must try to read that 'sign' and store up in our minds what we learn, as a squirrel stores his nuts for winter, so that often we may find out things of importance to ourselves or others. And I 'll tell you it makes life a jolly lot more interesting than when one goes about 'lak wit' eye shut'! as Toiney says. I 've never had such good times as since I 've been a scout: —

Then hurrah for the woods, hurrah for the fields,
Hurrah for the life that 's free,
With a heart and mind both clean and kind,
The Scout's is the life for me!

And we 'll shout, shout, shout,
For the Scout, Scout, Scout,
For the Scouts of the U.S.A.!"

The speaker exploded suddenly in a burst of song, throwing his broad hat into the air with a yell on the refrain that woke the echoes of the log shanty, while the breezy orchestra in the tree-tops, like noisy reed instruments, came in on the last line: —

"For the Scouts of the U.S.A.!"

Colin and Coombsie were enthusiastically shouting it too.

"Say! Col, that fellow suits me all right," whispered Marcoo, nudging his chum and pointing toward the excited scout.

"Me, too!" returned Colin.

"Pshaw! he thinks he's It, but I think the opposite," murmured Leon truculently.

"To what troop or patrol do you belong, Nix?" questioned his cousin.

"Peewit Patrol, troop six, of Philadelphia! I was a tenderfoot for six months; now I'm a second-degree scout — with hope of becoming a first-class one soon. Want to see my badge?" pointing to his coat. "Each patrol is named after a bird or animal. We use the peewit's whistle for signaling to each other: Tewitt! Tewitt!"

Again the woods rang with a fairly good imitation of the peewit's — or European lapwing's — whistling note.

"Oh! I'd put a patent on that whistle if I were you," snapped Leon sarcastically: "I'm sure nothing like it was ever heard in these — or any other — woods! We'd better be moving on or the mosquitoes will eat us up," he added hastily. "There has n't been any frost to get rid of them yet."

But as the quartette of boys left the log-camp behind and, with the terrier in erratic attendance,

plunged again into the thick woods, it by and by became apparent to each that, so far as a knowledge of their exact whereabouts went or an ability to locate any point of destination, they were approaching the truth of Toiney's words and wandering "lak wit' eye shut!"

For a time they kept to a logging-road that branched off from the shanty, a mere grass-grown, root-obstructed pathway, over which, when that great white leveler, Winter, evened things up with his mantle of snow, the felled trees were drawn on a rough sled to some point where stood the movable sawmill.

The dense woods were intersected at long intervals by such half-obliterated paths; in their remote recesses lurked other rough shanties where a scout might read the "sign" that told of the hard life of the lumbermen.

But neither vine-laced road nor shanty was easy of discovery for the uninitiated.

"Whew! it kind o' brings the gooseflesh to be so far in the woods as this without having the least idea whether we're getting anywhere or not." Thus spoke Coombsie at the end of half an hour's steady tramping and plowing through the underbrush. "Are you sure that you know in which direction lies the cave called the Bear's

Den, Leon? A logging-road runs past that, so I've heard."

"Oh, we'll arrive there in time, I guess; Varney's Paintpot is somewhere in the same direction as the cave," replied the pseudo-leader evasively. "They're some distance apart, but we've made a bee-line from one to the other when I've been in the woods with my father or brother Jim."

But these woods were a different proposition now, without an older head and more experienced woodlore to rely upon: Leon, who had never before posed as a guide through their mazes, secretly acknowledged this.

He had not imagined that it would be so difficult to find one's way, unaided, in this wilderness of endless trees and underbrush, through whose changing aspects ran the same mystifying thread as if the gold-brown gloom of a shadowy hillslope, — where only the sunbeams waltzing on dry pine-needles seemed alive, — or the jeweled twilight of a grassy alley bound a gossamer handkerchief about one's eyes, so that one groped blindfold against a blank wall of uncertainty.

"Say! but I wish I had brought my pocket compass with me," groaned the scout. "Guess I did n't live up to our scout motto: Be Prepared!

But then — " he looked at his cousin — " we started out with the intention of going down the river and you objected to my trotting back for it, Marcoo, when we determined on a hike through the woods."

" I was afraid that if the men knew what we were planning, they'd have headed us off as Toiney tried to do," confessed Marcoo candidly.

" Well, I wish now that I had gone back; I could have packed the luncheon into my knapsack; it would have been much more easily carried than in this basket. I miss my staff too!" Nixon deposited the lunch-basket, with which he was now impeded, on the ground in a green woodland glade where the noble forest trees, red oak, cedar, maple, interspersed with an occasional pine, hemlock, or balsam fir, rose to a height of from sixty to a hundred feet, bordering a patch of open ground, starred with wildflowers, dotted with berries.

Delicate queen's lace, purple gentians, starry wood-asters, waxen Indian pipes, made it seem as if this must be the wood-fairies' dancing-ground, where at night they rode a moonbeam from flower to flower, and sipped juice from the milk-berries, bunch-berries or scarlet fox-berries that strayed at intervals along the ground.

"I'd like to stay *here* forever." Colin stretched himself upon a bank of moss, his mind going back to the explorer's longing, to the wood-hunger which had consumed him, as he lay upon the fragrant marsh-grass some hours before. He was getting his wish now — and not everybody gets that without having to pay for it. "The trees look kind o' fatherly an' protecting; don't they?" he murmured lazily.

Yes, here one felt admitted to the companionship of those noble trees, — the greatest story-tellers that ever were, when one listens and interprets their conversations with the breeze. A "Hurrah for the woods!" was on every tongue as the boys chewed a berry or smoked a pearly orchid pipe.

Moods changed a little as they took up their wandering again and presently waded, single file, through a jungle of bushes, scrub oak, dwarf pine, pigmy cedar and birch, laced with brambles. Here the trees overhead were of less magnitude and the tall leafy undergrowth foamed about their ears, giving them somewhat the distracted feeling of being cast away on a trackless sea — each sequestered in his own little boat — with emerald billows shutting out all view of port.

"Three cheers! We're almost through with this jungle. I guess we're coming to more open ground again — none too soon, either!" cried Leon who led, with his dog. "Should n't wonder if we were approaching a swamp: it may be Big Swamp, as the men call that great alder-swamp that's all spongy in parts and dotted with deep bog-holes, where one might sink out of sight quick!

"For goodness' sake! look at the crows," he whooped three minutes later, as, leaving the wavy undergrowth behind, he plunged out on a mossy slope strewn with an occasional boulder. "*The crows!* What do you suppose they're after? They're teasing something! 'Hollering' at something!"

The same amazed exclamation broke from his companions' lips. Halfway down the slope was an old and leafy chestnut tree. Around this the crows were circling, now alighting on the branches, now fluttering off again on sloping sable wing, their yellow beaks gleaming.

A cawing din filled the air, with an occasional loud "Quock!" of alarm or indignation.

"They're teasing something — perhaps it's a squirrel! I've seen them do that before; they're regular pests!" exclaimed Leon, inconsistently

finding fault with the crows for being birds of the same feather with himself.

"Whew! there 's something doing here. Let 's see what it is!" Nixon was equally excited.

With the terrier scampering ahead, the four boys set off at a run toward the crow-infested tree.

"I believe there's something — some animal — hidden in the hollow between the branches!" Leon gave vent to a low shout, his brown eyes yellow with excitement. "It 's round *that* the crows are hovering!"

"There is! There is! I see the end of a big, bushy tail. It is n't a squirrel's tail either!" returned the scout in a fever of mystification. "Let 's go softly, so that we won't frighten the thing whatever it is — then we can have a good look at it!"

"Suppose it should be a wildcat, then we 'd 'scat'!" gasped Colin, feeling his wildest hopes and tremors fulfilled. "I see its nose — a black nose — over the edge of the hollow! It's like — Gee! it can't be another coon from the swamp — like the dead one that Toiney found in the hencoop?"

Simultaneously the terrier, Blink, was launching himself like a white arrow toward the spread-

ing nut-tree, which stood upon a grassy knoll, while the woods rang with his fusillade of barking.

And from the hollow in the tree came a shrill whimpering cry, remarkably like that of a small and frightened child.

Starrie Chase fairly gambolled with excitement: "That 's where you 're right, Col," he panted. "If it is n't a coon — another young coon — I 'm a Dutchman! I hunted one in the woods, by night, with my brother, last year!"

"He keeps on singing," breathed Coombsie. "Is n't his cry like a two-year-old child's?"

"Oh! if we only had my brother's coon dog here — and could get him down from the tree — the dog might finish him!" Leon seemed emitting sparks of excitement from his pointed elbows and other quivering joints. "Go for him, Blink!" he raved, hardly knowing what he said. "You 're not afraid of anything — you feel like a mastiff! Oh! we *must* get him out of that tree-hollow on to the ground."

"Caw! Caw! . . . Caw! . . . Quock! Quock!" At the approach of the boys and dog the crows set up a wilder din, describing broader circles round the tree or fluttering upward to its loftier branches.

Again came that petulant whimpering cry from

the hollow of the chestnut, where a young raccoon (probably brother to the intruder which had made a short bee-line through the woods, guided by instinct and its nose, to Toiney's hencoop) now wailed and quailed, finding himself between two sets of enemies: the barking dog and excited boys below, the pestering crows above.

Abandoning the wise nocturnal habits of his forefathers, with the rashness of youth, he too had strayed at sunrise from that secluded hole among the ledges on the borders of Big Swamp, filled with dreams of juicy cornfields and other delicacies.

Not readily finding such a land of milk and honey, he climbed into the hollow of this chestnut tree, flanked by a young ash upon the knoll, and there composed himself to sleep.

But thither the crows, flocking, found him; and recognizing in him an hereditary enemy of their eggs and nestlings, set to work to make his life a burden.

Nevertheless Raccoon Junior preferred their society to that of the boys and dog which instinct warned him to dread above all other foes.

As the well-bred terrier — game enough to face any foe, though it might prove a sorry day for him if he should tackle that young raccoon —

reared on his hind legs, and clawed the bark of the trunk in his excitement, the rash Junior climbed swiftly out of the hollow and fled up among the branches of the tall chestnut tree, seeking to hide himself among the long thick leaves amid a stormy "Quock!" and "Caw! Caw! Caw!" from the crows.

"Oh! there — there he goes! See his stout body and funny little legs!"

"And his long gray hair and the black patch over his eyes — makes him look as if he wore spectacles!"

"And his bushy tail! Huh! there's some class to that tail — all ringed with buff and black."

Such cries broke from three wildly excited throats. Leon spent no breath in admiration. Like lightning, he had snatched up a stone and sent it flying up the tree after the fugitive with such good aim that it struck one of the short, climbing legs.

Another whimpering cry — sharp and shrill as that of a wounded child — rang down among the thick leaves.

"What did you do that for? You've broken one of his legs, I think!" exclaimed the scout.

"So much the better! If he should light down from the tree, he can't run so fast! I want that

dandy tail of his — and his skin!" Starrie Chase was now beside himself with the greedy feeling, that possessed him whenever he saw a wild animal, that its own skin did not belong to it, but to him.

"Say, fellows!" he cried wildly, "if you 'll stay right here by the tree and prevent his coming down, I — I 'll run all the way back to that farm-clearing — I guess I can find my way — and bring back Toiney's gun, and shoot him. Say — will you?"

No such promise was forthcoming.

"Well, I know what I 'll do!" Leon tore off his jacket. "I 'll tie the sleeves of my coat round the trunk of the tree; that will prevent his coming down, so I 've heard my father say. Bother! they won't meet. I'll have to use your coat too, Nix!"

He snatched up the scout's Norfolk jacket, thrown down beside the basket at the foot of the tree, and was knotting it to his own, when there was a wild shriek from Colin: —

"Look! Look! He 's jumped over into the other tree. Oh! he 's come down; he 's on the ground now — there beyond the ash tree — rolling over like a ball! Oh, he 's going — going like a slate sliding downhill!"

While Leon had been so cleverly knotting the

coats round the tree-trunk, and his terrier barking up it, the young coon had outwitted them and dropped like an acrobat to the ground, having gained the odds of a dozen yards in his race for safety.

Off went the terrier after him, now! Off went the four boys, hot on the trail too, madly rushing down the hill clear to the edge of the alder-swamp toward which it sloped — yes! and into its quagmire borders too, while the crows, raving like a foghorn, supplied music for the chase.

But the speed of the limping wild animal enabled it, having gained its short legs — despite the injury of the stone — to reach the shelter of a quivering clump of alders where Blink worried in and out in vain, nose to the ground — sniffing and baffled.

"Oh, we 've lost sight of him now! He 's given us the slip," cried Colin, recklessly dashing for the alders.

Suddenly the air cracked with his cry that raved with terror like the crows: "Help! *Help!* I 'm into it now — into it plunk — into Big Swamp! I 'm sinking — s-sinking above my waist! Help! Help!"

CHAPTER IV

VARNEY'S PAINTPOT

"I'm 'plunk' into it! I'm sinking in the swamp mud! I can't — can't get out! Oh — h-help — help!"

Colin's wild cries as he found himself sinking in the oozing, olive-green mud of the vast alder-swamp, struck his comrades with a momentary blind horror.

The half-immersed boy was indeed "plunk" into it; he was submerged to his waist and slowly sinking inch by inch farther, now fairly gibbering in his frantic terror of being swallowed bodily by one of the many sucking throats of Big Swamp.

He writhed and struggled madly, snatching at the rank grass whose slimy roots came away in his hand — at the bushes — even at the brilliant poison sumac, already ruddy as a swamp lamp — with the clutch of a drowning man; Leon's remembered words stinging his ears like noisome insects: "There are *live* spots in that swamp where one might go out of sight — *quick!*"

The hideous slimy life of the spongy bog, half water, half mud!

Leon's sharp-featured face at that moment seemed to be carved out of pale wood as his snapping eyes took in the swamp, with its groves of whispering alders, its margin of scattered birch-trees and swamp cedars, the lamplike sumac burning maliciously — the sinking boyish figure amid the moist green dreariness!

Now, Starrie Chase was by Nature's gift more quick-witted than his companions, even than the trained boy scout.

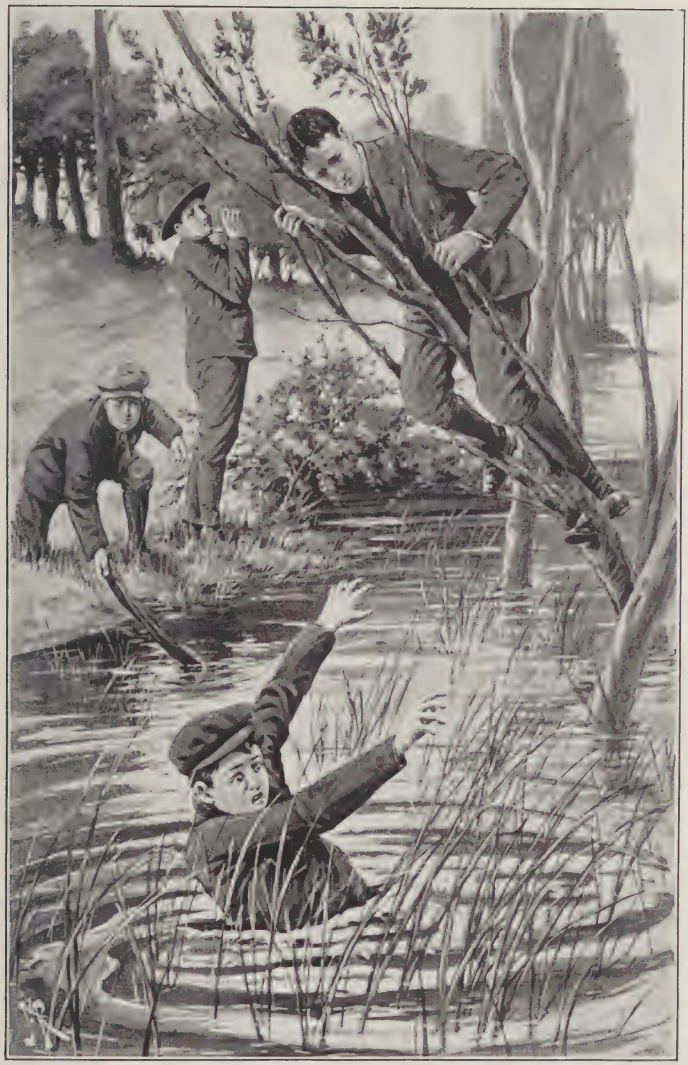
"If we try to wade in toward him, we'll sink ourselves!" he cried. "I'll try to haul him out with that birch-tree."

A leaping, plunging run, sinking to his ankles, and with the long bound of a gray squirrel he alighted upon the supple trunk of a tall white-birch sapling that grew within the borders of the swamp!

No squirrel ever climbed more rapidly than did he to its middle branches.

And the yellow flame in his eyes, now, was not a spark from persecution's fire.

"Hold on, Col! Keep up! The tree'll pull you out. I'll bend it down to you. When it comes within reach of your arms catch hold of the trunk!



"HELP! *HELP!*"

Hang on for your life! I'll shin down, and 't will hoist you up — you're lighter than I am!"

He was bending the tall, supple trunk, with its leafy crown, down — down — as he spoke. It creaked beneath his fifteen-year-old weight. The strained roots groaned in the swampy soil.

"Gee! if the roots should give way *I'll* land in the soup too," was his piercing thought; and a shudder ran down his spine as he saw the pools of olive-green bog-soup beneath him — bottomless pools — in which floated slimy, stagnant things, leaves and dead insects.

Pools more horrible even than the patch of liquidescent mud in which Colin was sinking!

But Starrie Chase would never have attained to the leadership that was his among the boys of Exmouth if there had been nothing in him but the savage — the petty, not the primitive savage — that persecuted chipmunks and old women. Now the hero who slept in the shadow of the savage was aroused and there was "something doing"!

Lying flat upon the pliant sapling he forced it down with his heaving chest, with every ounce of will and weight in his strong body.

The silvery trunk bent to the sinking boy like a white angel.

With a cry he flung his arms upward and grasped it. At the same moment Leon slid down and jumped to a comparatively firm spot of the quagmire.

The flexible young tree rebounded slowly with the weight lighter than his pendant from it — like a stone attached to the boom of a derrick.

In a few seconds it was almost upright, with Colin Estey, mud-plastered to his arm-pits, hanging on like an olive-green bough, his dilated eyes starting from his head, his face blanched to the gray-white of the friendly trunk.

"Slide down now, Col, an' jump — I 'll stand by to give you a hand!" cried Leon, the daring rescuer.

And in another minute the victim was safe on *terra firma* — out of the slimy throat of Big Swamp.

"Oh! I thought I was going — to sink down — out of sight!" he gasped between lips that did not seem to move, so tightly was the skin of his face stretched by terror. "That I 'd be swallowed by the mud! I would have been — but for Leon!"

"You surely were quick! Quick as a flash!" The two boys who had been spectators gazed open-mouthed at Starrie Chase as if they saw the

hero who for three brief minutes had flashed out into the open.

"Whew! I got such a fright that I'll never forget it; I declare I feel weak still," mumbled Coombsie.

"Pooh! your fright — was nothing to mine," Colin's stiff lips began to tremble now with recovering life. "And I'm plastered with mud to my shoulder-blades — wet too! But I don't care, as I'm out of it!" He glanced nervously toward Big Swamp, and at the clump of restless alders which probably still sheltered Raccoon Junior.

"The sun is quite hot here; let's move back up the hill and sit down!" Nixon pointed to the grassy slope behind them where the crows still flapped their wings around the chestnut-tree with an occasional relieved "Caw!" "We'll roll you over there, Col, and hang you out to dry!"

"Well! suppose we eat our lunch during the process, eh?" suggested Marcoo. "Goodness! would n't it be 'one on us' if a fox had sneaked out of the woods and run off with the lunch-basket? We left it under the chestnut-tree."

They made their way back to that nut-tree, whose hoary trunk was still swathed with Leon's coat and the scout's Norfolk jacket, knotted

round it to prevent the young coon which had signally outwitted them from "lighting down."

"Whew! I feel as if 't was low tide inside me. A scare always makes me hungry," remarked Leon, not at all like a hero, but a very prosaic boy. "I think eating in the woods is the best part of the business!"

"I say! You'd make a jolly good scout; do you know it?" put forth Nixon.

But the other only hunched his shoulders with the grin of a contortionist as he bit into a ham sandwich, richly flavored with peanut butter and quince jelly from the shaking which the basket had undergone on its passage through the woods.

The troop of hungry crows which had pecked unavailingly at the wicker cover, had retired to some distance and watched the picnic in croaking envy.

Colin lay out in the sun, being rolled over at intervals by the scout, to dislodge the caking mud from his clothes, and to knead up his "soggy" spirits.

"Well! if we had carried out our first intention this morning, Nix, if we had gone down the river to the Sugarloaf Sand-Dunes near its mouth, we might *all* have stuck high and dry, in the

river mud, if the tide forsook us," said Coombsie by and by, as he dispensed a limited amount of cold coffee from a pint bottle. "That's a pleasure in store, whenever we can get Captain Andy to take us in his motor-boat. Say! he's great; he was skipper of a Gloucester fishing schooner until a year ago, when he lost his vessel in a fog; the main-boom fell on him and broke his leg; he's lame still. He stays in Exmouth with his daughter most o' the time now. He was one o' the Gloucester crackerjacks: he saved so many lives at sea that he used to be called the Ocean Patrol!"

"Why, he must be a regular sea-scout," Nixon's eye watered; he had the bump of hero-worship strongly developed.

"Captain Andy's laying for you, Leon," remarked Coombsie, passing round some jelly-roll.

"Oh, I guess I know why!" came the nonchalant answer. "It's for tying a wooden shingle to a long branch of the apple-tree near old Ma'am Baldwin's house, so that it would keep tapping on her door through the night. If the wind is in the right direction it works finely — keeps her guessing all the time! I've lain low among the marsh-grass and seen her come to the

door, in the dark, a dozen times, gruntin' like a grizzly! I hate solitary cranks!"

"Captain Andy says that she was never peculiar as she is now, until her youngest son ran wild and was sent to a reformatory," suggested Marcoo gravely.

"I'd cut out that trick, if I were you!" growled the scout.

"Oh! I don't know; there are times when a fellow must paint the town red — or something — or 'he'd bust'! That reminds me, we were going to daub ourselves with red from Varney's Paintpot. If we're to find it to-day, we'd better be moving on pretty soon. It must be after two o'clock now."

"I haven't got my watch on, but it's quite that, or later," the scout glanced upward at the brilliant afternoon sun.

"Hadn't we better give up all idea of visiting the Paintpot or the Bear's Den," Marcoo suggested rather nervously, "and begin tramping homeward — if we can discover in which direction home lies? I think we ought to try and find some outlet from the woods."

"So do I. Col will have a peck of swamp mud to carry round with him. His clothes are heavy and damp. If I only had my compass we could

steer a fairly straight course, for these woods lie to the southeast of the town; don't they? Anybody got a watch on? I left mine at home." Nixon looked eagerly at his companions.

"Our boy-scout handbook tells us how to use the watch as a compass by pointing the hour-hand to the sun and reckoning back halfway to noon, at which point the south would be."

"My 'timer' is out of commission," regretted Marcoo.

Neither of the other two boys possessed a watch.

"In that case we might trust to the dog to lead us out of the woods. We'd better just tell Blink to go home, and follow him; he'll find his way out some time; won't you, pup?" Nix stooped to fondle the tan ears of the terrier which had taken to him from the first, having never harbored the ghost of a suspicion of his being a "flowerpot fellow."

The little dog stretched his jaws in a tired yawn. The pink pads of his paws were sore from much running, following up rabbit trails, and the rest. But the purple lights in his faithful brown eyes said plainly: "Leave it to me, fellows! Instinct can put it all over reason, just now!"

But Blink's master started an opposition

movement. He had been invited to guide the expedition; he was averse to resigning such leadership to his terrier; in that case his supposed knowledge of the woods, of which he had boasted aforetime to the Exmouth boys, would henceforth be regarded as a "windy joke."

"Follow Blink!" Thus he flouted the idea. "If we do, we won't get out of these woods before midnight! He'll dodge round after every live thing he sees, from a weasel to a grasshopper — like a regular will-o'-the-wisp. The sensible thing to do is to search for a logging-road — we're sure to come to one in time — and follow that on. Or a stream — a stream would lead out on to the salt-marshes, to join the river."

"There don't appear to be any streams in these woods; they seem as dry as an attic!" Nixon, the scout, knew that the proposal now adopted by the majority was all wrong, contrary to the advice derived through his book from the great Chief Scout, Grand Master of Woodlore, but he hated to raise another fuss or make a split in the camp.

So the quartette of boys filed slowly up the slope and back into the woods, Coombsie carrying the almost empty basket, containing sparse remnants of the feast: "We may be hungry

before we arrive home!" he remarked, with involuntary foreboding in his tone.

That foreboding increased as they pressed on. Each one now became depressingly sure that he was wandering in the woods "lak wit' eye shut"; without any knowledge of his bearings, or of how to retrace his steps to the log shanty flanked by the mountain of sawdust, whence he might be able to find his way back to the farm-clearing where he had encountered the musical wood-chopper, frightened boy and dead raccoon.

The boy scout was silently reproaching himself for having fallen short of the prudent standard inculcated by his scout training. Carried away by the novelty of these strange woods and his equally strange companions, he had lowered the foresail of prudence — just tramped along blindly with the others — taking no note of landmarks, nor leaving any trace behind him that would serve to guide him back along the course by which he had come.

But, then, he had trusted to Leon's leadership; and the latter's boasted knowledge of the woods proved, as Coombsie had suspected, to consist of bluff as a chief ingredient!

"I wish I had kept my eyes open and noticed things as I came along, or that I had thought of

notching the trees at intervals with my penknife — blazing a trail — which we could have followed back," lamented the scout. "I guess we're only wandering round in a circle now; we're not hitting a logging-road or trail of any kind. Tck! puppie," — emitting an inarticulate summons between his tongue and palate, — "let's see what's the matter with those forepaws of yours! Blood, is it? Have you scratched them?"

He stooped to examine Blink's slim white forelegs.

"*Gee whiz!* it isn't blood — it's clay — red clay: we must be on the trail of Varney's Paintpot, fellows!"

So they were! They presently found it, that red-ochre bed, lying in obscurity among the bushes, scrub oak, dwarf pine and cedar, together with tall ferns, that stood guard over it jealously, in a particularly dense portion of the woods

Once the clay had been vivid and valuable, with wonderful painting properties. Many an Indian had stained his arrow blood-red with it. Many a white man, an early settler, had painted the rude furniture of his home from that forest paintpot — then a moist tank of Nature's pigment.

Later on it had been used too, as civilization progressed, and was claimed by the man whose name it bore.

Now, it was for the most part caked and dried up, its coloring power weakened; yet there were still moist and vivid spots such as that in which Blink, with the dog's unerring instinct for scenting out the unusual, had smeared himself.

And those spots the boys promptly turned into a rouge-pot. They painted their own faces and each other's, until more savage-looking red men these woods had never seen.

They forbore from delaying to smear their bodies, as Nixon had suggested, for one word was now booming in each tired brain like a foghorn through a mist: "Lost! Lost! *Lost!*" And they could not quite escape from it in this new diversion.

Still they tried to dye hope a fresh rose-color at this forest paintpot too: to silence with whooping yells and fantastic capers, and in flitting war-dances in and out among the trees, the grim raving of that word in their ears.

They painted Blink likewise in zebra-like stripes across his back, whereupon he promptly rolled on the ground, blurring his markings,

until he was a mottled and grotesque red-and-white object.

"He looks like a clown's dog," said Coombsie. "If any one should meet us in the woods, they 'd think we were a troop of painted guys escaped from a circus! We 'll create a sensation in the town when we get home — if we ever do?" *sotto voce.* "Had n't we better stop 'training on' now, and try to get somewhere?"

So, controlling the training-on, capering savage now rampant in each one corresponding to his painted face, they toiled on again, while the afternoon shadows lengthened in the woods — until they stood transfixed, their war-whoops silenced, before another surprise of the woods on which they had tumbled, unprepared.

It was a lengthy gray cairn of stones with a rude wooden marker at the top bearing the date 1790, and at the foot a modern granite slab inscribed with the words: "Bishop's Grave," and the date of the stone's erection.

"*Bishop's Grave!*" Coombsie ejaculated, while the empty basket drooped heavily from his hand as if "the grasshopper had suddenly become a burden." "I've heard of the grave, but I've never seen it before. Bishop was lost in these woods about a hundred and twenty-one

years ago; he could n't find his way out and wandered round till he died. His body was discovered months afterwards and they buried it here."

Awe fell upon the four boys. Their faces were drawn under the smearing of paint. Their eyes gleamed strangely, like sunken islands, from out their ruddy setting. The mottled terrier, with that sympathetic perception which dogs have of their masters' moods, pointed one ear sharply and drooped the other, like a flag at half-mast, while he stared at the rude cairn.

The scout impulsively lifted his broad-brimmed hat as he was in the habit of doing if, when marching with his troop, he encountered a funeral.

In the mind of each lad tolled like a slow bell the menacing echo of Toiney's words: "You walkee — walkee — en you haf so tire' en so lonesam you *go deaded!*"

CHAPTER V

"YOU MUST LOOK OUT!"

THE four boys did not linger long before that lonely grave; the fears it evoked were too unpleasant. They pushed on again through the woods, each one clearing his throat of a husky tickling that was third cousin to a weary sob.

The scout was inwardly combating the depressing memory of Toiney Leduc's warning with the advice of the Chief Scout that if he should ever find himself lost in the woods, Fear, not hunger or cold, would prove his worst enemy.

"I must n't lose my grip! I must keep my head — not be fogged by fear! I'm a boy scout of America," he reminded himself.

Still the shadow of that gray cairn stalked him as well as the others. Even Leon was subdued by it. His manner had lost the last trace of its shallow cocksureness. The mantle of bluff had melted from him, leaving him a distracted, temper-tried boy like his three companions.

"I know that the cave called the Bear's Den is not quite a mile from Bishop's grave, but I

have n't the least idea of how to go about reaching it," he admitted. "A logging-road passes the cave; that might lead us somewhere. I wish we could strike a stream."

"So do I! My mouth is dry as dust; I 'm parched with thirst." Nixon, as he spoke, stooped, picked up a round pebble, inserted it between his dry palate and tongue and began sucking on it, as on a gum-drop.

"What on earth are you doing that for?" questioned Leon sharply; the nerves in his tired body were now jangling like an instrument out of tune; together with his three companions he was cross as a thorn — ready to quarrel with his own shadow.

"'What am I doing it for?' Why! to start the saliva," quavered the scout, sucking hard; "to prevent me from feeling the thirst so much."

"*Blamed* rubbish!" Starrie Chase snorted. "As if sucking a stone like a baby would do you any good!"

"Everything is 'rubbish,' except what you know yourself; and *that's* next to nothing!" Nixon was now equally cross. "You don't know half as much about the woods as your dog does. If it had n't been for you, we 'd have been out of this place long ago!"

"Oh! you think you 're It, because you 're a boy scout, but I think the opposite!"

"Shut up! Don't give me any of your 'jaw'!"

But there was a sudden, queer contortion of the scout's face on the last word.

Abruptly he stalked on, humming to himself — a curious-looking being, with his painted face and dazed eyes under the broad-brimmed hat.

"What 's that you 're singing, Nix?" Coombsie was catching at a straw to divert thought from Bishop's grave.

"Oh! go on, let's hear it. Sounds lively!" urged Leon, whose temper had sunk beneath the realization of their plight, a quenched flash.

The scout sidetracked his pebble between right cheek and gums and began to sing with what cheerfulness he could muster, as much for his own encouragement as that of his companions, a patrol song, the gift of a poet to the boy scouts of the world: —

"Look out when your temper goes
At the end of a losing game;
And your boots are too tight for your toes,
And you answer and argue and blame!
It 's the hardest part of the law,
But it 's got to be learned by the scout,
For whining and shirking and 'jaw,'
All patrols look out!

"These are our regulations,
There 's just one law for the scout,
And the first and the last, and the present and the past,
And the future and the perfect is look out!"

Before Nixon had finished the chorus his three companions were shouting it with him as a spur to their jaded spirits.

"Ours is a losing game in earnest — all because we did n't look out and take proper precautions so that we might have some chance of returning by the way that we came," remarked the soloist with a grim laugh. "Now, we 'jolly well must look out!' as the song says. I 'm going to climb the next tree that 's good an' tall, and see whether I can discover any faraway smoke that would show us where a house might be, — or a gap in the woods, — or anything."

"Good idea! I'll climb too," seconded Leon. "You choose one tree; I'll take another, and see what we can make out!"

But they were toiling through a comparatively insignificant part of the fine woods now, where the foamy undergrowth billowed about their ears. Here the birch-trees, hickories, and maples, with an occasional pine and hemlock, only averaged from thirty-five to forty feet in stature. Not for another half-mile or so did Nixon sight a tall

stately trunk towering above its forest brethren, its many-pointed leaves proclaiming it to be a fine red oak.

"Whoo'! Whoo'! It's me for that oak-tree!" he cried. "I'll shin up that, right to the top and scour the horizon. 'T will be easily climbed too!"

"See that freak pine with the divided trunk a little farther on? I'm going to climb that," announced Leon Chase. "It's a fine tree, if it is a freak — like the Siamese Twins."

In another minute with the agility of a cat he had climbed to the crotch of the freak tree where its twin trunks divided.

"Look out! those lower branches are brown an' rotten, Starrie. I would n't trust to them if I were you!" shouted Colin, indicating the drooping pine-boughs about ten feet from the ground; he kicked a similar large drab branch, as he spoke, which had fallen and lay decaying at the foot of the freak tree.

"Right you are! I won't." Leon was a wonderful climber; twining his arms and legs round one olive-green trunk of the divided pine he managed to reach the firm boughs above through whose needles the late afternoon breeze crooned a sonorous warning.

The scout, meanwhile, had clambered like a

squirrel nearly to the top of the splendid oak-tree. Presently the two boys upon the ground heard a shrill "Tewitt! Tewitt!" the signal-whistle of his peewit patrol, fully sixty feet above their heads, followed by Nixon's voice shouting: "Can't see smoke anywhere, fellows — or any sign of a real break in the woods. But there seems to be some sort of little clearing about two hundred yards from here, I should say!" He was carefully scanning the space over intervening tree-tops with his eye, knowing that if he could judge this distance in the woods with approximate accuracy it would count as a point in his favor toward realizing the height of his ambition and graduating into a first-class scout.

Leon, a moment later, was singing out blithely from the pine-tree's top: "I see that gap between the trees too, just a little way farther on. I guess it's a logging-road at last — probably a shanty as well — the road will lead somewhere anyhow. Hurrah! We 'll be out o' the misery in time. Race you down, Nix?" he challenged exuberantly at the top of his voice.

Then began a swift, racing descent, marked on Leon's part by the touch of recklessness that often characterized his movements; he was de-

termined that though the boy scout might excel him in certain points of knowledge, he should not outdo him in athletic activity.

"There! I knew I could 'trim' you anywhere — in a tree or on the ground," he cried all in one gasping breath as — caution to the winds — he stepped on one of the lower dead boughs which he had avoided going up.

It snapped under his hundred and twenty-five pounds of sturdy weight, like a breaking twig. He crashed to the ground, alighting in a huddle upon the decayed branch, the crumbling windfall, at the foot of the tree.

"Gracious! are you hurt, Starrie?" Coombsie and Colin rushed to him.

"I — think — not! I guess I'm all here." Leon made a desperate attempt to rise, and instantly sank back, clutching at the grass around him with such a sound as nobody had ever heard before from the lips of Leon Starr Chase — the moan of a maimed creature.

"My ankle! My right ankle!" he groaned. "I twisted it, coming down on that rotten branch. It feels as if every tree in the woods had fallen on it together! Ouch! I — can't — stand." Drops of agony stole out upon his forehead.

"You've sprained it, I guess!" Nixon was

now bending over the victim. "Here, let me take your shoe off, before the foot swells! Perhaps, with Col and me helping you, you can limp along to that clearing?"

Leon made another attempt, with the leather pressure removed, but sank down again and began to relieve himself of his stocking too, in order to examine the injury.

"Ou-ouch!" he groaned savagely. "My ankle is as black as a thundercloud already. It feels just like a thunderstorm, too — all heavy throbs an' lightning shoots of pain!"

The trail of those fiery darts could be traced in the livid blue and yellow streaks that were turning the rapidly swelling ankle, in which the ligaments were badly torn, to as many hues as Joseph's coat, against a background of sullen black.

"Well! this is the — limit!" Coombsie dropped the lunch-basket, to which he had clung faithfully, into a nest of underbrush: with a probable logging-road within reach that might serve as a clue to lead them somewhere, here was one of their number with a thunderstorm in his ankle!

And then the hero that dwelt in the shadow of the savage in that contradictory breast of Leon Chase flashed awake again in a moment, as

at Big Swamp; the real plucky boyhood in him shone out like a star!

"'T will be dark — in the woods — before very long," he said, his voice sprained too by pain, while his clammy face, still coated with the red-ochre pigment of Varney's Paintpot, smeared by the drops of agony and his coat-sleeve, was a lurid sight. "You fellows will have to hustle if you want to reach that road — if it is a logging-road — and get out of the woods before night! I can hardly — hobble. I'd better stay here: Blink will stay with me; won't you, pup? When you boys get home — let my father know — he and Jim will come out an' find me; they know every inch of the woods."

"And leave you alone in the woods for hours? Not I, for one!" The scout's answer was decisive, so were the loyal protests of the other two lads.

Blink, with a shrewd comprehension that something was wrong with his master, had been alternately licking Leon's ear and the inflamed pads of his own paws. At the mention of his name he pressed so close to the victim's side, sitting bolt upright on his haunches, that their two bodies might have been joined at one point like the trunks of the freak tree. And the purple

fidelity lights in his brown eyes said plainly that not hunger, thirst, or lonely death itself, could separate him from the being who was a greater fellow in his eyes than any scout of the U.S.A.

The other three boys were at that stage of fatigue and discomfiture when the well of emotion is easily pumped; their eyes grew moist at the dog's steadfast look.

But the scout shook himself brusquely as if trying to awake something within.

"We ought to be able to fix you up so that you can get along to that little clearing, anyhow!" he said, his mind busy with the sixth point of the scout law and how under these circumstances he could best live up to it and help an injured comrade. "We might form a chair-carry, Col and I, but the undergrowth ahead is too thick; we could n't wrestle through — three abreast. Ha! we 'd better make a crutch for you; that 's the idea! There 's a birch sapling, neat an' handy, as an Irishman would say!"

And the ubiquitous white birch, the woodman's friend, came into play again. Its slim trunk, being wrenched from the ground, roots and all, and trimmed off with Nixon's knife, formed a fair prop.

"Chuck me your handkerchiefs!" said the crutch-maker to the other two uninjured boys. "We'll pad the top of it, so that it won't dig into his armpit. Now then, Leon! get this under your right arm and put your left one round my neck — that will fix you up to hobble a short distance."

A half-reluctant grin, distorted by agony, convulsed Leon's face as, leaning hard upon the white-birch prop, he arose and limped a few steps; he recollected how at odd moments in the woods — whenever there was n't too much doing — he had believed that he held a grudge against the scout for making him yield one sharply contested point and that about such an infinitesimal thing in his eyes as the brief life of a chipmunk.

"Oh! I guess I can limp along with the crutch," he said, smearing the dew of pain over his bedaubed face, now ghastly under the paint.

"Go on; you 're only wasting time!" Nixon drew the other's left arm with its moist cold hand around his neck — all the heat in Leon's body had gone to swell the thunderstorm in his ankle.

And thus plowing, stumbling through the undergrowth, the scout's right hand keeping the impudent twigs from poking his companion's eyes out, they reached the narrow clearing along

which the ambient light of a September sunset flowed like a golden river.

No coveted log shanty, where at least they could encamp for the night, decorated it.

But on its opposite side there loomed before the boys' eyes as they issued from the woods a great, lichen-covered rock, over twenty feet high, with a deep cavernous opening that yawned like a sleepy mouth at sunset as it swallowed the rays streaming into it.

"Glory halleluiah! it's the Bear's Den — at last," ejaculated Leon, pain momentarily eclipsed. "Thanks, Nix: you're a horse!" as he withdrew his arm from his comrade's shoulders. "But that cave is about five miles from anywhere — from any opening in the woods! What on earth are we going to do now?"

"Why! light a fire the first thing, I guess," returned the boy scout practically.

CHAPTER VI

THE FRICTION FIRE

"We have n't got any matches to start a fire with!" Coombsie sat down in a pool of gold with the well-nigh empty basket beside him, and turned baffled eyes upon the others.

"I have a few in a safety box in my pocket. Thank goodness! I did n't go back on our scout motto: 'Be Prepared!' so far as matches are concerned, anyway." Nixon felt in each pocket of his Norfolk jacket with a face that lengthened dismally under the smears of Varney's Paintpot. "*Gone!*" he ejaculated despairingly. "I must have lost the box!"

"It probably dropped out of your pocket into the grass when I tied our coats round the chestnut-tree, to prevent that young coon from 'lighting down,'" suggested Leon, and *his* face grew pinched; it was not a refreshing memory that conjured up a picture of Raccoon Junior limping back to the hole among the ledges near Big Swamp, with a leg broken by his stone, at the moment when a fellow had a whole thunderstorm in his ankle.

"Well! we're up against it now," gasped the scout. "We can't get out of the woods to-night; that's sure! We could sleep in the cave and be jolly comfortable too" — he stooped down and examined its wide interior — "if we only had a fire. But, without a camp-fire or a single blanket, we'll be uncomfortable enough when it comes on dark; these September nights are chilly."

He threw his hat on the ground, drew his coat-sleeve across his ruddy forehead, rendering his bedaubed countenance slightly more grotesque than before. He had forgotten that it was smeared, forgotten paint and frolic. An old look descended upon his face.

He was desperately tired. Every muscle of his body ached. His head was confused too from long wandering among the trees; his thoughts seemed to skip back into the woods away from him; he felt himself stalking them as Blink would stalk a rabbit. But there was one thing more alive in him at that moment than ever before, a sense of protective responsibility.

With Leon disabled and the two younger boys completely worn out, it rested with him alone to turn a night in the Bear's Den into a mere "corking" adventure, or to let it drag by as a dark age of discomfort with certainly bad

results for two of the party. Nixon had felt Leon's hand as it slipped from his neck at the edge of the clearing, it was clammy as ice; his first-aid training as a scout told him that the injured lad would feel the cold bitterly during the night.

Starrie Chase would probably "stick it out without squealing," as in such circumstances he would try to do himself. But it would be a hard experience. And young Colin's clothing was still sodden from his partial immersion in Big Swamp. It was one of those moments for the Scout of the U.S.A. when the potential father in the boy is awake.

"I 've *got* to fix things up for the night, somehow," he wearily told himself aloud. "I wonder — I wonder if I could manage to start a fire without matches — with 'rubbing-sticks'? I did it once when we were camping out with our scoutmaster. But he helped me. If I could only get the fire, now, 't would be a — great — stunt!"

"'Start a fire without matches!' You 're crazy!" Colin and Coombsie looked sideways at him; they had heard of people being "turned round" in their heads by much woodland wandering.

"Shut up, you two!" commanded Leon, suddenly imperious. "He knows what he's about. He did a good stunt in helping me along here."

"If I could only find the right kinds of wood to start a friction fire — balsam fir for the fire-board and drill, and a little chunk of cedarwood to be shredded into tinder!" The boy scout was eagerly scanning the trees on either side of the grass-grown logging-road, trees which at this moment seemed to have their roots in the forest soil and their heads in Heaven's own glory.

"*There's* a fir-tree! Among those pines — a little way along the road!" Leon spoke in that slow, stiff voice, sprained by pain. "Perhaps I can help you — Nix?"

"No, you lie still, but chuck me your knife, it's stronger than mine! I ought to have two tools for preparing the 'rubbing-sticks,' so the Chief Scout tells us in our book, but I'll have to get along somehow with our pocketknives."

Nix Warren was off up the road as he spoke; hope, responsibility, and ambition toward the performance of a "great stunt," forming a fighting trio to get the better of weariness.

The glory was waning from the tree-tops when he returned, bearing with him one sizeable chunk

of balsamic fir-wood and a long stick from the same tree.

"Any sort of stick will do for the bent bow which is attached to the drill and works it; that 's what our book says," he murmured, as if conning over a lesson. "Who 's got a leather shoelace? You have — cowhide laces — in those high boots of yours, Colin! Mind letting me have one?"

The speaker was excitedly setting to work, now, fashioning the flat fireboard from the chunk of fir-wood, carving a deep notch in its side, and scooping out a shallow hole at the inner end of the notch into which the point of the upright drill would fit.

In feeling, he was the primitive man again, this modern boy scout: he was that grand old savage ancestor of prehistoric times into whose ear God whispered the secret, unknown to beast or bird, of creating light and warmth for himself and those dependent on him, when the sun forsook them.

"Say! can't you fellows get busy and collect some materials for a fire, dry chips and pine-splinters — fat pine-splinters — and dead branches? There 's plenty of good fuel around! You wood-finders 'll have a cinch!"

It certainly was a signal act of faith in Colin and Coombsie when they bestirred their weary limbs to obey this command from the wizard who was to try and evoke the mysterious fire-element latent in the combustible wood he handled, but hard to get at without the aids which civilization places at man's disposal.

They each kept a corner of their inquisitive eyes upon him while they collected the fuel, watching the shaping of the notched fireboard, of the upright pointed drill, over a dozen inches in length, and the construction of a rude bow out of a supple stick found on the clearing, with Colin's cowhide shoe-lace made fast to each end as the cord or strap that bent the bow.

This cord was twisted once round the upper part of the drill whose lower point fitted into the shallow hole in the fireboard.

"Whew! I must find a piece of pine-wood with a knot in it and scoop that knot out, so that it will form a disc for the top of the drill in which it will turn easily," said the perspiring scout. "Oh, sugarloons! I've forgotten all about the *tinder;* we may have to trot a long way into the woods to find a cedar-tree."

"I'll go with you, Nix," proffered Marcoo, while Leon, lying on the ground near the cave,

with his dog pressing close to him, undertook the task of scooping that soft knot out of the pine-disk.

"All right; bring along the tin mug out of your basket; perhaps we may find water!"

And they did! Oh, blessed find! Wearily they trudged back about sixty yards into the woods, in an opposite direction from that in which they had traveled before — Nixon taking the precaution of breaking off a twig from every second or third tree so as to mark the trail — before they lit on a grove of young cedars through which ran a sound, now a purling sob, now a tinkling laugh; softer, more angel-like, than the wind's mirth!

"*Water!* A spring! Oh — tooraloo!" And they drank their fill, bringing back, along with the cedar-wood for tinder — water, as much as their tin vessel would hold, for the two boys and dog keeping watch over the fire-sticks on the old bear's camping-ground.

The soft cedar was shredded into tinder between two stones. The drill was set up with its lower point resting in the notched hole of the fire-board, its upper point fitting into the pine-disk which Nixon steadied with his hand.

Then the boy scout began to work the bent

bow which passed through a hole in the upper part of the drill, steadily to and fro, slowly turning that drill, grinding its lower point into the punky wood of the fireboard.

In the eye of each of the four boys the coveted spark already glowed, drilled by excitement out of the dead wood of his fatigue.

Even the dog, his jaws gaping, his tongue lolling out, lay stretched at attention, his gaze intent upon the central figure of the boy scout working the strapped bow backward and forward, turning the pointed drill that bored into the fireboard.

Ground-up wood began to fall through the notch in the fireboard adjacent to the hole upon another slab of wood which Nixon had placed as a tray beneath it.

This powdered wood was brown. Slowly it turned black. Was that smoke?

It was a strange tableau, the four disheveled boys with their red-smeared faces, the painted clown's dog, all holding their breath intent upon the primitive miracle of the fire-birth.

Smoke it was! *Increasing smoke!* And in its tiny cloud suddenly appeared the miracle — a dull red spark at the heart of the black wood dust.

"What do you know about that?" Marcoo's voice was thick.

"Gee! that 's a — wonderful — stunt. I guess you could light a fire with a piece of damp bark and a snowball!" Leon looked up at the panting scout.

Colin's mind was telegraphing back to the moment when he lay on the salt-marshes that morning, hungry for the woods. If any one had told him that, before night, he would assist at a forest drama like this!

"Hush! Don't speak for fear you 'd hoodoo it! We haven't got it yet — the fire! Perhaps — perhaps — I can't make it burn." It was the most wonderful moment of his life for the boy scout as he now took a pinch of the cedar-wood tinder, half-enclosed in a piece of paper-like birch-bark and held it down upon the red fire-germ — in all following the teaching of the great Chief Scout.

Then he lifted the slab of wood that served as tray, bearing the ruddy fire-embryo and tinder, and blew upon it evenly, gently. It blazed. The miracle was complete.

"*Wonderful stunt!*" murmured Starrie Chase again. His hand in its restless uneasiness had been plucking large flakes of moss from the gray rock

behind him and turning them over, revealing the medicinal gold thread that embroidered the earthy underside of the sod; he was sucking that bitter fibre — supposed to be good for a sore mouth, but no panacea for a sprained ankle — while a like gold thread of fascinated speculation embroidered the ruddy mask of his face.

"Hurrah! we'll have a fire right away now, that will talk to us all night long." The triumphant scout lowered the flame-bud to the ground, piled over it some of the resinous pine-splinters and strips of inflammatory bark, fanning it steadily with his hat. In a few minutes a rollicking camp-fire was roaring in front of the old Bear's Den.

"Now! we must gather some big chunks, dry roots and stumps, to keep the fire going through the night, cut sods to put round it and prevent its spreading into the woods, and break up some pine-tips to strew in the cave for a bed. There's lots of work ahead still, fellows, before we can be snug for the night!"

The scout, having got his second breath with his great achievement, was working hard as he spoke; Marcoo and Colin followed his example in renewed spirits. Leon, chafing at his own inactivity, tried to stand and sank down with a groan.

"How 's the thunderstorm sprain?" they asked him.

"Worse — ugh-h! And I 'm parched with thirst — still!"

"Well, we 'll lope off into the woods and bring you back some more water. If you 'll leave a little in the bottom of the mug I 'll soak our handkerchiefs in it and wrap them round your ankle; cold applications may relieve the pain;" the scout was recalling what he had learned about first aid to the injured.

Darkness descended upon the old bear's stamping-ground. But the camp-fire burned gloriously, throwing off now and again a foam of flame whose rosy clots lit in the crevices of the tall rock and bloomed there for an instant like scarlet flowers.

The work necessary in making camp for the night done, the four boys gathered round it, dividing their scanty rations, the scraps of food left in Coombsie's basket, and speculating as to how early in the morning a search-party would come out and find them.

"Toiney Leduc will certainly be one of the party. Toiney is a regular scout; he 's only been here a year, but he knows the woods well," remarked Leon, then was silent a minute, gazing wistfully into the heart of the flames which

filled the pause with snappy conversational fireworks.

"Tell us something about this boy scout business, bo'!" he spoke again in the slow, sprained voice, his feverish eyes burning into the fire, his tone making the slangy little abbreviation stand for brother, as he addressed Nixon. "It seems as if it might be The Thing — starting that fire was a great stunt — and if it 's The Thing — every fellow wants to be in it!"

"Oh! you don't know what good times we have," began the scout.

And briefly skimming from one point to another, he told of the origin of the Boy Scout Movement far away in Africa during the defense of a besieged city, and of the great English general, the friend of boys, who had fathered that movement.

Leon's eyes narrowed as he still gazed into the camp-fire: it was a long descent from the defense of a beleaguered city to the championship of a besieged chipmunk, but his quick mind grasped the principle of fiery chivalry underlying both — one and the same.

"Can you sing some more of that U.S.A. song which you were shouting in the woods near the log camp?" Marcoo broke in, as the narrator

dwelt on those good times spent in hiking, trailing, camping with the scoutmaster.

"Perhaps I can — a verse or two! That's the latest for the Boy Scouts of America — the Scouts of the old U.S. Don't know whether I have a pinch of breath left, though!"

And the flagging voice began, gathering gusto from the camp-fire, glee from the stars now winking through the pine-tops: —

"Mile after mile in rank or file,
We tramp through field and wood:
Or off we hike down path or pike,
One glorious brotherhood.
Hurrah for the woods, hurrah for the fields,
Hurrah for the life that's free!
With a body and mind both clean and kind,
The Scout's is the life for me!"

"Chorus, fellows!" he cried: —

The rolling music in the pine-trees, the reedy whistle of the breeze among beeches and birches, soft cluck of rocking branches, the bagpipe skirling of the flames leaping high, fluted and green-edged, all came in on that chorus ; together with the four boyish voices and the bark of the dog as he bayed the blaze : the night woods rang for the Scouts of the U.S.A.

"If when night comes down we are far from town,
Both tired and happy too,
Camp-fires we light and by embers bright
We sleep the whole night through.
Hurrah for the sun, hurrah for the storm,
Hurrah for the stars above!
We feel secure, safe, sane and sure,
For we know that God is Love."

"Why have you that knot in your tie?" asked Leon after the last note had died away in forest-echo, while the scout was wetting the bandages round his inflamed ankle before they crept into the cave to sleep.

"To remind me to do one good turn to somebody every day."

"Well, you can untie it now; I guess you've done good turns by the bunch to-day!"

Lying presently upon the fragrant pine-tips with which they had strewn the interior of the cave, the scout's tired fingers fumbled for that knot and drowsily undid it. He had lost both way and temper in the woods. But he had tried, at least, to obey the scout law of kindness.

As he lay on guard, nearest to the cave's entrance, winking back at the stars, this brought him a happy sense of that wide brotherhood whose cradle is God's Everlasting Arms.

From the well of his sleepy excitement two

words bubbled up: "Our Father!" Rolling over until his nose burrowed among the fragrant evergreens, he repeated the Lord's Prayer, adding — because this had been an eventful day — a brief petition which had been put into his lips by his scoutmaster and was uttered under unusual stress of feeling, or when he remembered it: That in helpfulness to others and loyalty to good he might be a follower of the Lord of Chivalry, Jesus Christ, and continue his faithful soldier and servant "until the scout's last trail is done!"

It was almost morning when he awoke for the second time, having stirred his tired limbs once already to replenish the camp-fire.

Now that hard-won fire had waned to a dull red shading on the undersides of velvety logs, the remainder of whose surface was of a chilly gray from which each passing breeze flicked the white flakes of ash like half-shriveled moths.

"Whew! I must punch up the fire again — but it's hard to get the kinks out o' my backbone;" he straightened his curled-up spine with difficulty and stumbled out on the camping-ground.

It was that darkest hour before dawn. The stars were waning as well as the fire. The trees which

had been friends in the daytime were spectators now. Each wrapped in its dark mantle, they seemed to stand curiously aloof, watching him.

He attacked the logs with a stick, poking them together and thrusting a dry branch into the ruddy nest where the fire still hatched.

Snip! Snap! Crackle! the flames awoke. Mingling with their reviving laughter, came a low, strange cluck that was not the voice of the fire, immediately followed by a long shrill cry with a wavering trill in it, not unlike human mirth.

It hailed from some point in the scout's rear.

"For heaven's sake!" The stick shook in his fingers. "Can it be a wildcat — or another coon?"

Stiffly he wheeled round. His eyes traveled up the great rock — in whose cave his companions lay sleeping; as they gained the top of that old grayback, they were confronted by two other eyes — mere twinkling points of flame!

The scout's scalp seemed to lift like a blown-off roof. His throat grew very dry.

At the same moment there was a noiseless flitting as of a shadow from the rock's crest to a near-by tree whence came the weird cry again.

"*An owl!* Well, forevermore! And my hair is standing straight still!"

"*What is it? What is it, Nix?*" came in muffled cries from the cave.

"Only a screech owl; it's unusual to find one so far in the woods as this!"

As it happened two ruddy screech owls, faithful lovers and monogamists, which had dwelt together as Darby and Joan in the hollow of an old apple-tree in a distant orchard, being persecuted both by boys and blue jays, had eschewed civilization, isolating themselves, at least from the former, in the woods.

As dawn broke between the tall pines and a pale river of daylight flowed along the logging-road, they were seen, both together, upon a low bough, with the dawn breeze fluffing their thick, rufous plumage, making them look larger than they really were, and their heads slowly turning from side to side, trying to discover the meaning of a camp-fire and other strange doings in this their retreat.

"Oo-oo! look at them," hooted Colin softly, creeping out of the cave and stealthily approaching their birch-tree. "They have yellow eyes and faces like kittens. Huh! they're more comical than a basket of monkeys. Oh, there they go."

For even as his hand was put forth to touch

them, they vanished silently as the ebbing shadows in the train of night.

"This must be a great place for owls," said Leon, blinking like one — not until far on in the night had he slept owing to the wrenching pain in his ankle. "Listen! there goes the big old hooter — the great horned owl — the Grand Duke we call him. Hear him 'way off: 'Whoo-whoo-hoo-doo-whoo!' Sounds almost like a wolf howling! *Ou-ouch!*"

"Is your ankle hurting badly, Starrie?"

"It's — fierce."

"Daylight is coming fast now; I'll be able to find the spring and wet those bandages again — and bring you a drink too"; this from the scout.

"Thanks. You're the boy, Nix!"

The brotherly act accomplished, there was silence in the cave where the four boys had again stretched themselves while young Day crept up over the woods.

Suddenly Leon's voice was heard ambiguously muttering in the cave's recess: "If it's The Thing, every fellow wants to be in it!"

"Say! fellows, I've got an idea," he put forth aloud.

"Out with it, if it's worth anything!" from Colin.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Leon! get it out quick, and let us go to sleep again!" pleaded Coombsie, who knew that if Starrie Chase was oppressed by an idea, other boys would hear it in his time, not in theirs.

"I propose that after we get home — when my ankle is better — we start a boy scout patrol in our town and call it the Owl Patrol! I guess we 've heard the owls — different kinds — often enough to-night, to be able to imitate one or other of them."

"Good enough! The Scout's is the life for me!" sang out Colin.

"The motion is seconded and carried — now let 's go to sleep!" from Marcoo.

"As I expect to stay in these parts for six months, or longer, I 'll get transferred from the Philadelphia Peewits to the new patrol!" decided Nixon.

"Bully for you! We 'll ask Kenjo Red and Sweetsie to come in; they 're dandy fellows — and who else?" Leon hesitated.

"Why don't you get hold of that frightened boy who was with Toiney on the edge of the woods? We had a boy like him in our Philadelphia troop," went on Nixon hurriedly, ignoring a surge of protest. "Scared of his own shadow

he was! Abnormal timidity — with a long Latin name — due to pre-natal influences, according to the doctors! Well, our scoutmaster managed somehow to enlist him as a tenderfoot. When he got out into the woods with us and found that every other scout was trying to help him to become a 'fellow,' why! he began to crawl out of his shell. He 's getting to be quite a boy now!"

"But the '*Hare*'! he 'd spoil — *Ouch!*" A sudden wrench of agony as Leon moved restlessly put the pointed question as to whether the mental pain which Harold Greer suffered might not be as hard to drag round as a thunderstorm ankle.

"All right, Nix! Enlist him if you can! I guess you 'll have to pass on who comes into the new patrol."

Colin dug his nose into the pine-tips with a skeptical chuckle: that new patrol would have a big contract on hand, he thought, if it was to gather up the wild, waste energy of Leon, — that element in him which parents and teachers sought to eradicate, — turn it to good account, and take the fright out of the Hare.

But from the woods came a deep bass whoop that sounded encouraging: the Whoo-whoo-hoo-

doo-whoo! of the Grand Duke bidding the world good-morning ere he went into retreat for the day.

It was answered by the Whoo-whoo-whooah-whoo! of a brother owl, also lifting up his voice before sunrise.

"Listen, fellows!" cried Leon excitedly. "*Listen!* The feathered owls themselves are cheering the Owl Patrol."

CHAPTER VII

MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL

And thus the new patrol was started.

Three weeks after the September morning when an anxious search-party led by Asa Chase, Leon's father, and by that clever woodsman Toiney Leduc, had started out at dawn to search the dense woods for four missing boys, and found a grotesque-looking quartette with faces piebald from the half-effaced smears of Varney's Paint-pot, breakfasting on blueberries and water by a still ruddy camp-fire, — three weeks after those morning woods had rung with Toiney's shrill "Hôlà!" the first meeting for the formation of the Owl Patrol was held.

In virtue of his being already a boy scout with a year's training behind him, Nixon Warren was elected patrol leader; and Leon Starr Chase who still limped as a result of his reckless descent of that freak pine-tree, was made second in rank with the title of corporal — or assistant patrol leader.

Among the half-dozen spectators, leading men

of the small town, who had assembled to witness the inaugural doings at this first meeting and to lend their approval to the new movement for the boys, there appeared one who was lamer than Leon, his halting step being due to a year-old injury which condemned him to limp somewhat for the remainder of his life.

This was Captain Andrew Davis, popularly known as Captain Andy, who had been for thirty years a Gloucester fishing-skipper, one of the present-day Vikings who sail forth from the Queen Fishing City at the head of its blue harbor.

He had commanded one fine fishing-vessel after another, was known along the water-front and among the fishing-fleet as a "crackerjack" and "driver," with other more complimentary titles. He had got the better of the sea in a hundred raging battles on behalf of himself and others. But it partially worsted him at last by wrecking his vessel in what he mildly termed a "November breeze" — in reality a howling hurricane — and by laming him for life when at the height of the storm the schooner's main-boom fell on him.

He was dragged forth from under it, half-dead, but, "game to the last," refused to be carried below. Lashed to the weather main-bitt — one

of the sawed-off posts rising from the vessel's deck to which the main-sheet was made fast — in order to prevent his being swept overboard by the great seas washing over that deck, he had kept barking out orders and fighting for the lives of his crew so long as he could command a breath.

"And I did n't lose a man, Doc!" he said long afterwards to his friend and admirer, the Exmouth doctor, the hard-working physician with whose long-suffering bell Leon had mischievously tampered. "I did n't lose a man — only the vessel. When the gale blew down we had to take to the dories, for she was just washing to pieces under us. Too bad: she was an able vessel too! But I guess I 'll have to 'take my medicine' for the rest of my life — an' take it limping!" — with a rueful smile.

But the many waters through which he had passed had not quenched in Captain Andy the chivalrous love for his human brothers. Rather did they baptize and freshen it until it sprouted anew, after he took up his residence ashore, in a paternal love for boys which kept his great heart youthful in his massive, sixty-year-old body; and which kept him hopefully dreaming, too, of deeds that shall be done by the sons now being reared

for Uncle Sam, that shall rival or outshine the knightly feats of their fathers both on land and sea.

So he smiled happily, this grand old sea-scout, as, on the occasion of the first meeting for the inauguration of the Boy Scout Movement, he heaved his powerful frame into a seat beside his friend the doctor who was equally interested in the new doings.

"Hi there, Doc!" said Captain Andy joyously, laying his hand, big and warm as a tea-kettle, on the doctor's arm, "we 're launching a new boat for the boys to-night, eh? Seems to me that it 's an able craft too — this new movement — intended to keep the lads goin' ahead under all the sail they can carry, and on a course where they 'll get the benefit of the best breezes, too."

"That 's how it strikes me," returned the doctor. "If it will only keep Starrie Chase, as they call him, sailing in an opposite direction to my doorbell, I 'm sure I shall bless it! D' you know, Andy," the gray-bearded physician addressed the weatherbeaten sea-fighter beside him as he had done when they were schoolboys together, "when I heard how that boy Leon had sprained his ankle badly in the woods and that the family had sent for me, I said: 'Serve him right! *Let*

him be tied by the leg for a while and meditate on the mischief of his ways; I 'm not going to see him ! ' Of course, before the words were well out, I had picked up my bag and was on my way to the Chase homestead ! "

" Of course you were ! " Captain Andy beamed upon his friend until his large face with its coating of ruddy tan flamed like an aurora borealis under the electric lights of the little town hall in which the first boy scout meeting was held. " Trust you, Doc ! "

The ex-skipper knew that no man of his acquaintance lived up to the twelve points of the scout law in more thorough fashion than did this country doctor, who never by day or night closed his ears against the call of distress.

" I 'll say this much for the young rascal, he was ashamed to see me bring out my bandages "; the doctor now nodded humorously in the direction of Leon Chase, who made one of a semicircle composed of Nixon, himself and six other boys, at present seated round the young scoutmaster whom they had chosen to be leader of the new movement in their town.

" But by and by his tongue loosened somewhat," went on the grizzled medical man, " and he began to take me into his confidence about

the formation of this boy scout patrol; he seemed more taken up with that than with what he called 'the thunderstorm in his ankle.' Leon is n't one to knuckle under much to pain, anyhow! Somehow, as he talked, I began to feel as if we had n't been properly facing the problem of our boys in and about this town, Andy."

"I see what you mean!" Captain Andrew nodded. "Leon is as full of tricks as a tide rip in a gale o' wind. An' that 's the most mischievous thing I know!" with a reminiscent chuckle. "But what can you do? If a boy is chockfull o' bubbling energy that 's going round an' round in a whirl inside him, like the rip, it 's bound to boil over in mischief, if there ain't a deep channel to draw it off."

"That 's just it! Ours is a slow little town — not much doing for the boys! Not even a male teacher in our graded schools to organize hikes and athletics for them! I am afraid that more than one lad with no natural criminal tendency, has got into trouble, been ultimately sent to a reformatory, owing to a lack in the beginning of some outlet safe and exciting for that surplus energy of which you speak. Take the case of Dave Baldwin, for instance, son of that old Ma'am Baldwin who lives over on the salt-

marshes!" The doctor's face took on a sorry expression. "There was nothing really bad in him, I think! Just too much tide rip! He was the counterpart of this boy Leon, with a craving for excitement, a wild energy in him that boiled over at times in irregular pranks — like the rip — as you say."

"And you know what makes *that* so dangerous?" Captain Andy's sigh was heaved from the depths of past experience. "Well! with certain shoals an' ledges in the ocean there 's too much water crowded onto 'em at low tide, so it just boils chock up from the bottom like a pot, goes round and round in a whirl, strings out, foamy an' irregular, for miles. It 's 'day, day!' to the vessel that once gets well into it, for you never know where 't will strike you.

"And it 's pretty much the same with a lively boy, Doc: at low tide, when there 's nothing doing, too much o' something is crowded onto the ledges in him, an' when it froths over, it gets himself and others into trouble. Keep him interested — swinging ahead on a high tide of activity under all the sail he can carry, and there's no danger of the rip forming. That 's what this Boy Scout Movement aims at, I guess! It looks to me — my word! it *does* look to

me — as if Leon was already 'deepening the water some,' to-night," wound up Captain Andy with a gratified smile, scrutinizing the face of Starrie Chase, which was at this moment marked by a new and purposeful eagerness as he discussed the various requirements of the tenderfoot test, the elementary knowledge to be mastered before the next meeting, ere he could take the scout oath, be invested with the tenderfoot scout badge and be enrolled among the Boy Scouts of America.

"A movement such as this might have been the saving of Dave Baldwin," sighed the Doctor. "He was always playing such wild tricks. People kept warning him to 'cut it out' or he would surely get into trouble. But the 'tide rip' within seemed too much for him. No foghorn warnings made any impression. I 've been thinking lately of the saying of one wise man: 'Hitherto there has been too much foghorn and too little bugle in our treatment of the boys!' Too much croaking at them: too little challenge to advance! So I said to the new scoutmaster, Harry Estey, Colin's brother," nodding toward a tall young man who was the centre of the eager ring of boys, "I said, 'give Leon the *bugle:* give it to him literally and figuratively: you 'll need a bugler in

your boy scout camp and I 'll pay for the lessons ; it will be a better pastime for him than fixing my doorbell."

"I hope 't will keep him from tormenting that lonely old woman over on the marshes ; the boys of this town have made her life a burden to her," said Captain Andy, thinking of that female recluse "Ma'am Baldwin," to whom allusion had been made by Colin and Coombsie on the memorable day which witnessed their headstrong expedition into the woods. "She has been regarded as fair game by them because she 's a grain cranky an' peculiar, owing to the trouble she 's had about her son. He was the youngest, born when she was middle-aged — perhaps she spoiled him a little. Come to think of it, Doc, I saw the young scapegrace a few days ago when I was down the river in my power-boat! He was skulking like a fox round those Sugar-loaf Sand-Dunes near the bay."

"How did he look?"

"Oh, shrunken an' dirty, like a winter's day!" Captain Andy was accustomed to the rough murkiness of a winter day on mid-ocean fishing-grounds. "He made off when he saw me heading for him. He 's nothing but an idle vagrant now, who spends his time loafing between those white dunes and the woods on t' other side o'

the river. He got work on a farm after he was discharged from the reformatory, but did n't stick to it. Other fellows shunned him, I guess! Folks say that he 's been mixed up in some petty thefts of lumber from the shipyards lately, others that he keeps a row-boat stowed away in the pocket of a little creek near the dunes, and occasionally does smuggling in a small way from a vessel lying out in the bay. But that 's only a yarn! He could n't dodge the revenue officers. Anyhow, it 's too bad that Dave should have gone the way he has! He 's only 'a boy of a man' yet, not more 'n twenty-three. When I was about that age I shipped on the same vessel with Dave's father — she was a trawler bound for Gran' Banks — we made more than one trip together on her. He was a white man; and —"

"*Captain Andy!*" A voice ringing and eager, the voice of the scoutmaster of the new patrol who had just received his certificate from headquarters, interrupted the captain's recollections of Dave Baldwin's father. "Captain Andy, will you undertake to instruct these boys in knot-tying, before our next meeting, so that they may be able to tie the four knots which form part of the tenderfoot test, and be enrolled as scouts two weeks from now?"

"Sakes! yes; I'll teach 'em. And if any one of 'em is such a lubber that he won't set himself to learn, why, I'll spank him with a dried codfish as if I had him aboard a fishing-vessel. Belay that!"

And the ex-skipper's eye roved challengingly toward the scout recruits from under the heavy lid and short bristling eyelashes which overhung its blue like a fringed cloud-bank.

The threat was welcomed with an outburst of laughter.

"And, Doctor, will you give us some talks on first-aid to the injured, after we get the new patrol fairly started?" Scoutmaster Estey, Colin's elder brother, looked now at the busy physician, who, with Captain Andy and other prominent townsmen, including the clergymen of diverse creeds, was a member of the local council of the Boy Scouts of America which had been recently formed in the little town.

"Yes; you may rely on me for that. But"—here the doctor turned questioningly toward the weather beaten sea-captain, his neighbor — "I thought the new patrol, the Owl Patrol as they have named it, was to consist of eight boys, and I see only seven present to-night. There 's that tall boy, Nixon Warren, who 's visiting here, and

Mark Coombs, his cousin; then there 's Leon Chase, Colin Estey, Kenjo Red, otherwise Kenneth Jordan," the doctor smiled at the red head of a sturdy-looking lad of fourteen, "Joe Sweet, commonly called Sweetsie, and Evan Macduff. But where 's the eighth Owl, Andy? Is n't he fledged yet?"

"I guess not! I think they 'll have to tackle him in private before they can enlist him." The narrow rift of blue which represented Captain Andy's eye under the cloud-bank glistened. "You 'll never guess who they have fixed upon for the eighth Owl, Doc. Why! that frightened boy, Ben Greer's son, who lives on the little farm-clearing in the woods with his gran'father and a Canadian farmhand whom Old Man Greer hires for the summer an' fall."

"Not Harold Greer? You don't mean that abnormally shy an' timid boy whom the children nickname the 'Hare'? Why! I had to supply a certificate for him so that he could be kept out of school. It made him worse to go, because the other boys teased him so cruelly."

"Jus' so! But that brand o' teasing is ruled out under the scout law. A scout is a brother to every other scout. I guess the idea of trying to get Harold enlisted in the Boy Scouts and thereby

waking him up a little an' gradually showing him what 'bugaboos' his fears are, originated with that lad from Philadelphia, Nix Warren, who, as I understand, showed himself to be quite a fellow in the woods, starting a friction fire with rubbing-sticks an' doing other stunts which caused his companions to become head over heels interested in this new movement."

"But how did *he* get interested in Harold Greer?" inquired the doctor.

"Well, as they trudged through the woods on that day when they made circus guys of themselves at Varney's Paintpot, and subsequently got lost, they passed the Greer farm and saw Harold who hid behind that French-Canadian, Toiney, when he saw them coming. Apparently it struck Nix, seeing him for the first time, what a miserable thing it must be for the boy himself to be afraid of everything an' nothing. So he set his heart on enlisting Harold in the new patrol. He, Nix, wants to pass the test for becoming a first-class scout: to do this he must enlist a recruit trained by himself in the requirements of a tenderfoot; and he is going to try an' get near to Harold an' train him — Nixon's cousin, Mark Coombs, Marcoo, as they call him, told me all about it."

"Well, I like that!" The doctor's face glowed.

"Though I 'm afraid they 'll have difficulty in getting the eighth Owl sufficiently fledged to show any plumage but the white feather!" with a sorry smile. "I pity that boy Harold," went on the medical man, "because he has been hampered by heredity and in a way by environment too. His mother was a very delicate, nervous creature, Andy. She was a prey to certain fears, the worst of which was one which we doctors call 'cloister fobia,' which means that she had a strange dread of a crowd, or even of mingling with a small group of individuals. As you know, her husband, like Dave Baldwin's father, was a Gloucester fisherman, whose home was in these parts. During his long absences at sea, she lived alone with her father-in-law, her little boy Harold and one old woman in that little farmhouse on the clearing. And I suppose every time that the wind howled through the woods she had a fresh fit of the quakes, thinking of her husband away on the foggy fishing-grounds."

"Yes! I guess at such times the women suffer more than we do," muttered Captain Andy, thinking of his dead wife.

"Well!" the doctor cleared his throat, "after Harold's mother received the news that her husband's vessel was lost with all hands, on Quero

Bank, when her little boy was about five years old, she became more unbalanced; she would n't see any of her relatives even, if she could avoid it, save those who lived in the house with her. I attended her when she was ill and begged her to try and get the better of her foolishness for her boy's sake — or to let me send him away to a school of some kind. Both Harold's grandfather and she opposed the latter idea. She lived until her son was nine years old; by that time she had communicated all her queer dread of people — and a hundred other scares as well — to him. But in my opinion there 's nothing to prevent his becoming in time a normal boy under favorable conditions where his companions would help him to fight his fears, instead of fastening them on him — conditions under which what we call his 'inhibitory power of self-control' would be strengthened, so that he could command his terrified impulses. And if the Boy Scout Movement can, under God, do this, Andy, why then I 'll say — I 'll say that knighthood has surely in our day come again — that Scout Nixon Warren has sallied forth into the woods and slain a dragon more truly, perhaps, than ever did Knight of the Round Table by whose rules the boy scouts of to-day are governed!"

The doctor's last words were more to himself than to his companion, and full of the ardor of one who was a dragon-fighter "from way back": day by day, for years, he had grappled with the many-clawed dragons of pain and disease, often taking no reward for his labors.

As his glance studied one and another of the seven boyish faces now forming an eager ring round the tall scoutmaster, while the date of the next meeting — the great meeting at which eight new recruits were to take the scout oath — was being discussed, he was beset by the same feeling which had possessed Colin Estey on that September morning in the Bear's Den. Namely, that the Owl Patrol would have a big contract on hand if it was to get the better of that mischievous "tide rip" in Leon and prove to the handicapped "Hare" what imaginary bugaboos were his fears!

But Leon's face in its purposeful interest plainly showed that, according to Captain Andy's breezy metaphor, to-night he was really deepening the water in which his boyish bark floated, drawing out from the shoals among which he had drifted after a manner too trifling for his age and endowment.

And so the doctor felt that there *might* be

hope for the eighth Owl chosen, and not present, being still a scared fledgling on that little farm-clearing in the woods, having never yet shaken a free wing, but only the craven white feather.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOWLINE KNOT

Scout Nixon Warren, henceforth to be known as the patrol leader of the Owls, was himself possessed by the excited feeling that he was faring forth into the October woods to tackle a dragon — the obstinate Hobgoblin of confirmed Fear — when on the day following that first boy scout meeting in Exmouth he took his way, accompanied by Coombsie, over the heaving uplands that lay between the salt-marshes and the woodland.

Thence, through thick grove and undergrowth, they tramped to the little farm-clearing, where they had come upon Toiney and the dead raccoon.

Nixon had arrayed himself in the full bravery of his scout uniform to-day, hoping that it might attract the attention of the frightened boy whose interest he wished to capture.

The October sun burnished his metal buttons, with the oxidized silver badge upon his left arm beneath the white bars of the patrol leader, and

the white stripe at his wrist recording his one year's service as a scout.

Because of the impression they hoped to produce, Marcoo too had donned the uniform, minus stripes and badge — the latter he would not be entitled to wear until after the all-important next meeting when, on his passing the tenderfoot test, the scoutmaster would pin it on his shirt, but reversed until he should have proved his right to wear that badge of chivalry by the doing of some initial good turn.

But Marcoo, like his companion, carried the long scout staff and was loud in his appreciation of its usefulness on a woodland hike.

And thus, a knightly-looking pair of pilgrims, they issued forth into the forest clearing, bathed in the early afternoon sun.

As before, their ears were tickled afar off by the sound of a tuneful voice alternately whistling and singing, though to-day it was unaccompanied by the woodchopper's axe.

"That 's Toiney!" said Marcoo. "Listen to him! He 's just 'full of it'; is n't he?"

Toiney was indeed full to the brim and bubbling over with the primitive, zestful joy of life as he toiled upon the little woodland farm, cutting off withered cornstalks from a patch which

earlier in the season had been golden with fine yellow maize of his planting. His lithe, energetic figure focused the sun rays which loved to play over his knitted cap of dingy red, with a bobbing tassel, over the rough blue shirt of homespun flannel, and upon the queer heelless high boots of rough unfinished leather, with puckered moccasin-like feet, in which he could steal through the woods well-nigh as noiselessly as the dog-fox himself.

As the two scouts emerged into the open he was singing to the sunbeams and to the timid human "Hare" who basked in his brightness, a funny little fragment of song which he illustrated as though he had a sling in his hand and were letting fly a missile: —

> "Gaston Guè, si j'avais ma fron-de,
> Gaston Guè, je te l'aurais fron-dé!"

This he translated for Harold's benefit: —

> "Gaston Guè, if I haf ma sling,
> Gaston Guè, at you I vould fling!"

"Well! you need n't 'fling' at us, Toiney," laughed Nixon, stepping forward with a bold front. "Hullo! Harold!" he added in what he meant to be a most winning tone.

"Hullo, Harold! How are *you?*" supplemented Marcoo in accents equally sugared.

But the abnormally timid boy, with the pointed chin and slightly rodent-like face, only made an indistinguishable sound in his throat and slunk behind some bushes on the edge of the corn-patch.

Toiney, on the other hand, was never backward in responding vivaciously to a friendly greeting.

"Houp-e-là!" he explained in bantering astonishment as he surveyed the two scouts in the uniform which was strange to him. "*Houp-e-là!* We arre de boy! We arre de stuff, I guess, engh?" He pointed an earthy forefinger at the figures in khaki, his black eyes sparkling with whimsical flattery. "But, *comment*, you 'll no come for go in gran' forêt agen, dat 's de tam' you 'll get los' agen — hein?"

"No, we 're not going any farther into the woods to-day. We came to see *him*." Nixon nodded in the direction of Harold skulking timidly behind the berry bushes. "We want to speak to him about something."

"Ah — miséricorde — he 'll no speak on you; he 's a *poltron*, a scaree: some tam' I 'll be so shame for heem I 'll feel lak' cry!" returned Toiney, moved to voluble frankness, his eye glistening like a moist bead, now, with mortified pity. "Son gran'père — hees gran'fader — he 's

go on town dis day: he 's try ver' hard for get heem to go also — for to see! Mais, *non!* He 's too scaree!" And the speaker, glancing toward the screen of bushes, shrugged his shoulders despairingly, as if asking what could possibly be done for such a craven.

Scout Nixon was not baffled. Persistent by nature, he had worked well into the fibre of his being the tenth point of the scout law: that defeat, or the semblance thereof, must not down the true scout.

"Then I 'll talk to you first, Toiney," he said, "and tell you about something that we think might help him."

And in the simplest English that he could choose, eked out at intervals with freshman French, he made clear to Toiney's quick understanding the aim and methods of the Boy Scout Movement.

The Canadian, a born son of the woods, was quick to grasp and commend the return to Nature.

"*Ça c'est b'en!*" he murmured with an approving nod. "I 'll t'ink dat iss good for boy to go in gran' forêt — w'en he know how fin' de way — for see heem beeg tree en de littal wil' an-ni-mal, engh? Mais, miséri-corde," — his

shrugging shoulders pumped up a huge sigh as he turned toward Harold, — "mis-éri-corde! *he'll* no marche as *éclaireur* — w'at-you-call-eet — scoutee — hein? He'll no go on meetin' or on school, engh?"

And Tony set to work cutting down corn-stalks again as if the subject were unhappily disposed of.

Such was not the case, however. At one word which he, the blue-shirted woodsman, had used in his harangue, Nixon started, and a strange look shot across his face. He knew enough of French to translate literally that word *éclaireur*, the French military term for scout. He knew that it meant figuratively a light-spreader: one who marches ahead of his comrades to enlighten the others.

Could any term be more applicable to the peace scout of to-day who is striving to bring in an advanced era of progress and good will?

Somehow, it stimulated in Scout Warren the desire to be an *éclaireur* in earnest to the darkened boy overshadowed by his bugbear fears, now skulking behind the berry-bushes.

"I guess it's no use our trying to get hold of him," Coombsie was saying meanwhile in his cousin's ear. "See that old dame over there,

Nix?" he pointed to a portly, elderly woman with an immense straw hat tied down, sunbonnet fashion, over her head. "Well! she took care of Harold's mother before she died; now she keeps house for his grandfather, and she, that old woman, told my mother that up to the time Harold was seven years old he would often run and hide his head in her lap of an evening as it was coming on dark. And when she asked what frightened him he said that he was 'afraid of the stars'! Just fancy! Afraid of the stars as they came out above the clearing here!'"

"Gee whiz! What do you know about that?" exclaimed Nixon with a rueful whistle: that dark hobgoblin, Fear, was more absurdly entrenched than he had thought possible.

Yet Harold's seemed more than ever a case in which the scout who could once break down the wall of shyness round him might prove a true *éclaireur:* so he advanced upon the timid boy and addressed him with a honeyed mildness which made Coombsie chuckle and gasp, "Oh, sugar!" under his breath; though Marcoo set himself to second his patrol leader's efforts to the best of his ability.

Together they sought to decoy Harold into a conversation, asking him questions about his life,

whether he ever went into the woods with Toiney or played solitary games on the clearing. They intimated that they knew he was "quite a boy" if he 'd only make friends with them and not be so stand-offish; and they tried to inveigle him into a simple game of tag or hide-and-seek among the bushes as a prelude to some more exciting sport such as duck-on-a-rock or prisoner's base.

But the hapless "*poltron*" only answered them in jerky monosyllables, cowering against the bushes, and finally slunk back to the side of the blue-shirted farmhand with whom he had become familiar — whose merry songs could charm away the dark spirit of fear — and there remained, hovering under Toiney's wing.

"I knew that it would be hard to get round him," said Marcoo thoughtfully. "Until now all the boys whom he has met have picked on an' teased him. Suppose you turn your attention to *me* for a while, Nix! Suppose you were to make a bluff of teaching me some of the things that a fellow must learn before he can enlist as a tenderfoot scout! Perhaps, then, he 'd begin to listen an' take notice. I've got a toy flag in my pocket; let 's start off with that!"

"Good idea! You do use your head for something more than a hat-rack, Marcoo!" The patrol

leader relapsed with a relieved sigh into his natural manner. "I brought an end of rope with me; I thought we might have got along to teaching him how to tie one or other of the four knots which form part of the tenderfoot test. You take charge of the rope-end. And don't lose it if you want to live!"

He passed the little brown coil to his cousin and receiving in return the miniature Stars and Stripes, went through a formal flag-raising ceremony there on the sunny clearing. Tying the toy flag-staff to the top of his tall scout's staff, he planted the latter in some soft earth; then both scouts stood at attention and saluted Old Glory, after which they passed and repassed it at marching pace, each time removing their broad-brimmed hats with much respect and an eye on Harold to see if he was taking notice.

Subsequently the patrol leader stationed himself by the impromptu flagstaff, and delivered a simple lecture to Coombsie upon the history and composition of the National Flag; a knowledge of which, together with the proper forms of respect due to that starry banner, would enter into his examination for tenderfoot scout.

Both were hoping that some crumbs of information — some ray of patriotic enthusiasm — might

be absorbed by Harold, the boy who had never been to school, and who had scantily profited by some elementary and intermittent lessons in reading and writing from his grandfather. His brown eyes, shy as any rodent's, watched this parade curiously. But though Toiney tried to encourage him by precept and gesticulation to follow the boy scouts' example and salute the Flag, plucking off his own tasseled cap and going through a dumb pantomime of respect to it, the "scaree" could not be moved from his shuffling stolidity.

The starry flaglet waving from the scout's planted staff, might have been a gorgeous, drifting leaf from the surrounding woods for all the attention he paid to it!

"Say! but it's hard to land him, isn't it?" Nixon suspended the parade with a sigh almost of despair. "Well, here goes, for one more attempt to get him interested! Chuck me that rope-end, Marcoo! I'll show you how to tie a bowline knot; perhaps, as his father was a sailor — a deep-sea fisherman — knot-tying may be more in his line than flag-raising."

The next minute Coombsie's fingers were fumbling with the rope rather blunderingly, for Marcoo was by nature a bookworm and more

efficient along lines of abstract study than at anything requiring manual skill.

"Pass the end up through the bight," directed Scout Warren when the bight or loop had been formed upon the standing part of the rope. "I said *up*, not down, jackass! Now, pass it round the 'standing part'; don't you know what that means? Why! the long end of the rope on which you're working. Oh! you're a dear donkey," nodding with good-humored scorn.

Now both the donkey recruit and the instructing scout had become for the moment genuinely absorbed in the intricacies of that bowline knot, and forgot that this was not intended as a *bona-fide* lesson, but as mere "show off" to awaken the interest of a third person.

Their tail-end glances were no longer directed furtively at Harold to see whether or not he was beginning to "take notice."

So they missed the first quiver of a peculiar change in him; they did not see that his sagging chin was suddenly reared a little as if by the application of an invisible bearing-rein.

They missed the twitching face-muscles, the slowly dilating eye, the breath beginning to come in quick puffs through his spreading nostrils, like the smoke issuing from the punky

wood, heralding the advent of the ruddy spark, when in the woods they started a fire with rubbing-sticks. And just as suddenly and mysteriously as that triumphant spark appeared — evolved by Nixon's fire-drill, from the dormant possibilities in the dull wood — did the first glitter of fascinated light appear and grow in the eye of Harold Greer, the prisoner of Fear, disparagingly nicknamed the "Hare"!

"I — I can do that! I c-can do it — b-better than he can!" Stuttering and trembling in a strange paroxysm of eagerness, the *poltron* addressed, in a nervous squawk, not the absorbed scouts, but Toiney, his friend and protector.

"I can t-tie it better 'n *he* does! I know — I know I can!" The shrill boyish voice which seemed suddenly to dominate every other sound on the clearing was hoarse with derision as the abnormally shy and timid boy pointed a trembling finger at Marcoo still, like a "dear donkey," blundering with the rope-end.

Had the gray rabbit, which suddenly at that moment whisked out of the woods and across a distant corner, opened its mouth and addressed them, the surprise to the two scouts could scarcely have been greater.

"Oh! *you can*, can you?" said Nixon thickly.

"Let's see you try!" He placed the rope-end in Harold's hand, which received it with a fondling touch.

"Here you make a small loop on this part of the rope, leaving a good long end," he began coolly, while his heart bounded, for the spark in the furtive eye of the twelve-year-old "scaree" was rapidly becoming a scintillation: the scouts had struck fire from him at last.

A triumph beside which the signal achievement of their friction fire in the woods paled!

The intangible dragon which held their brother boy a captive on this lonely clearing, not permitting him to mingle freely with his fellows for study or play, was weakening before them.

"That's right, Harold! Go ahead: now pass the end up through the loop! Bravo, you're the boy! Now, around the standing part — the rope itself — and down again! Good: you have it. You can beat *him* every time at tying a knot: he's just a blockhead, is n't he?"

And Scout Warren pointed with much show of scorn at Marcoo, the normal recruit, who looked on delightedly. Never before did boy rejoice so unselfishly over being beaten at a test as Coombsie then! For right here on the little farm-clearing a strange thing had happened.

In the gloom of every beclouded mind there is one chink by which light, more or less, may enter; and a skillful teacher can work an improvement by enlarging that chink.

Harold's brain was not darkened in the sense of being defective. And the gray tent of fear in which he dwelt had its chink too; the scouts had found it in the frayed rope-end and knot.

For while the timid boy watched Coombsie's bungling fingers, that drab knot, upon which they blundered, suddenly beckoned to him like a star.

And, all in a moment, it was no longer his fear-stricken mother who lived in him, but his daring fisherman-father whose horny fingers could tie every sailor's knot that was ever heard of, and who had used that bowline noose in many an emergency at sea to save a ship-wrecked fellow-creature.

The bowline was the means of saving the fisherman's son now from mental shipwreck, or something nearly as bad. Harold's eager thoughts became entangled in it, while his fingers worked under Nixon's directions; he forgot, for once, to be afraid.

Presently the noose was complete, and Nixon was showing him how to tighten it by pulling on the standing part of the rope.

This achieved, the timid human "Hare" raised his brown eyes from the rope in his hand and looked from one to another of his three companions as in a dream, a bright one.

For half a minute a rainbowed — almost awed — silence held the three upon the clearing. Toiney was the first to break it. He flung his arms rapturously round the hitherto fear-bound boy.

"Bravo! mo' fin," he cried, embracing Harold as his "cute one." "Bravo! mo' smarty. Grace à bon Dieu, you ain' so scare anny longere! You go for be de boy — de brave boy — you go for be de scout — engh?" His eyes were wet and winking as if, now indeed, he felt "lak' cry"!

"Certainly, you 're going to be a scout, Harold," corroborated Nixon, equally if not so eloquently moved. "Now! don't you want to learn how to tie another knot, the fisherman's bend? You ought to be able to tie that, you know, because your father was a great fisherman."

Harold was nothing loath. More and more his father's spirit flashed awake in him. Through the rest of that afternoon, which marked a new era in his life, he seemed to work with his father's fingers, while the October sky glowed in radiant tints of saffron and blue, and a light breeze

skipped through the pine-trees and the brilliant maples that flamed at intervals like lamps around the clearing.

"We 'll come again to-morrow or the day after, Harold, and teach you more 'stunts'; I mean some other things, besides knot-tying, that a boy ought to know how to do," said Nixon as a filmy haze hovering over the edges of the woods warned them that it bore evening on its dull blue wings.

"Aw right!" docilely agreed Harold; and though he shuffled his feet timidly, like the "poltron" or craven, which Toiney had in sorrow called him, there was a shy longing in his face which said that he was sorry the afternoon was over, that he would look for the return of his new friends, the only boys who had ever racked their brains to help and not to hurt him.

Before their departure he had learned how to tie three knots, square or reef, bowline and the fisherman's bend. He had likewise admitted two more persons within the narrow enclosure of his confidence — the two who were to liberate him, the *éclaireurs*, the peace scouts of to-day.

And, for the first time in his life, he had awkwardly lifted his cap and saluted the flag of his country as it waved in miniature from the planted staff.

That afternoon was the first of several spent by Scout Warren and his aide-de-camp, Coombsie, on the little farm-clearing in the woods, trying to foster a boyish spirit in Harold, to overcome his dread of mingling with other boys, to awaken in him the desire to become a boy scout and share the latter's good times at indoor meeting, on hike, or in camp.

When the date of the second meeting drew near at which seven new recruits were to take the scout oath and be formally organized into the Owl Patrol, they had obtained the promise of this timid fledgling to be present under Toiney's wing, and enlist, too.

"I wonder whether he 'll keep his word or if he 'll fight shy of coming at the last minute?" whispered Nixon to Coombsie on the all-important evening when the other recruits led by their scoutmaster marched into the modest town hall, a neutral ground where all of diverse creeds might meet, and where the members of the local council, including the doctor and Captain Andy, had already assembled.

"If he does n't show up, Nix, you won't be able to pass the twelfth point of test for becoming a first-class scout by producing a recruit trained by yourself in the requirements of a

tenderfoot," suggested Marcoo. "You 've passed all the active tests, have n't you?"

Scout Warren nodded, keeping an anxious eye on the door. Having been duly transferred from his Philadelphia troop to the new patrol which had just been organized in this tide-lapped corner of Massachusetts — where it seemed probable now that he would spend a year at least, as his parents contemplated a longer stay in Europe — he had already passed the major part of his examination for first-class scout before the Scout Commissioner of the district.

He was an expert in first-aid and primitive cooking. He had prepared a fair map of a certain section of the marshy country near the tidal river. He could state upon his honor that he had accurately judged with his eye a certain distance in the woods — namely, from the top of that towering red-oak-tree which, when lost, he had chosen as a lookout point, to the cave called the Bear's Den — on the never-to-be-forgotten day when four painted boys and a dog finally took refuge in that rocky cavern; the boy scout's judgment of the distance being subsequently confirmed by lumbermen who knew every important tree in that section of the woods.

He had passed tests in swimming, tree-felling,

map-reading, and so forth! But he would not be entitled to wear, instead of the second-class scout badge, the badge of the first-class rank, beneath the two white bars of the patrol leader upon his left arm, until he produced the tenderfoot whom he had trained.

But would that timid recruit from the little woodland clearing — that half-fledged Owlet — appear?

"Suppose he should 'funk it' at the last minute?" whispered Marcoo tragically to the patrol leader. "No! No! As I'm alive! here they come — Toiney, with Harold in tow. Blessings on that Canuck!" he added fervently.

It was a strange-looking pair who now entered the little town hall: Toiney, in a rough gray sweater and those heelless high boots, removing his tasseled cap and depositing in a corner the lantern which had guided him with his charge through the woods, as facile to him by night as by day; and Harold, timidly clinging to his arm.

The brown eyes of the latter rolled up in panic as he beheld the big lighted room wherein the boy scouts and those interested in them were assembled. All his mother's unbalanced fear of a crowd returning upon him in full force, he

would have fled, but for Toiney's firm imprisonment of his trembling arm, and for Toiney's voice encouraging him gutturally with: —

"Tiens! mo' beau. *Courage!* Gard' donc de scout wit' de flag on she's hand! V'là! V'là!" pointing to Nixon, the patrol leader, supporting the Stars and Stripes. "Bon courage! you go for be de scout too — engh?"

His country's flag, blooming into magnificence under the electric light, had, to-night, a smile for Harold, as he saw it the centre of saluting boys.

Something of his brave father's love for that National Ensign, the "Color" as the fisherman called it, which had presided over so many crises of that father's life, as when on a gala day in harbor he ran it to the masthead, or twined it in the rigging, at sea, to speak another vessel, or sorrowfully hoisted it at half-mast for a shipmate drowned, — something of that loving reverence now began to blossom in Harold's heart like a many-tinted flower!

"Well! here you are, Harold." Coombsie was promptly taking charge of the new arrival, piloting him, with Toiney, to a seat. "I knew you 'd come; you 've got the right stuff in you; eh?"

It was feeble "stuff" at the moment, and in danger of melting into an open attempt at flight;

for Harold's eyes had turned from the benignant flag to the figure of Leon Chase.

But Leon had little opportunity, and less desire, to harass him to-night.

For, as the kernel of the initiatory proceedings was reached, the first of the seven new recruits to hold up the three fingers of his right hand and take the scout oath was Starrie Chase: —

"On my honor I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the scout law: To help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

Captain Andy cleared his throat as he listened, and the doctor wiped his glasses.

Then, as corporal or second in command of the new patrol, Leon stood holding aloft the brand-new flag of that patrol — a great, horned hoot-owl, the Grand Duke of the neighboring woods, embroidered on a blue ground by Colin's mother — while his brother recruits, having each passed the tenderfoot test, took the oath and were enrolled as duly fledged Owls.

Harold, the timid fledgling, came last. Supported on either side by his sponsors, Nixon and Coombsie, he distinguished himself by tying the four knots which formed part of the test with swiftness and skill, and by "muddling" through

the rest of the examination, consent having been obtained from headquarters that some leniency in the matter of answers might be shown to this handicapped boy who had never been to school and for whom — as for Leon — the Boy Scout Movement might prove The Thing.

Captain Andy declared it to be "The Thing" when later that night he was called upon for a speech.

"Boys!" he said, heaving his massive figure erect, the sky-blue rift of his eye twinkling under the cloudy lid. "Boys! it 's an able craft, this new movement, if you 'll only buckle to an' work it well. And it 's a hearty motto you have: BE PREPARED. Prepared to help yourselves, so that you can stand by to help others! Lads," — the voice of the old sea-fighter boomed blustrously, — "there comes a time to 'most every one who is n't a poor-hearted lubber, when he wants to help somebody else more than he ever wanted to help himself; and if he has n't made the most o' what powers he has, why! when that Big Minute comes he won't be 'in it.' Belay that! Make it fast here!" tapping his forehead. "Live up to your able motto an' pretty soon you 'll find yourselves going ahead under all the sail you can carry; an' you won't be trying to get a corner

on the breeze either, or to blanket any other fellow's sails! Rather, you 'll show him the road an' give him a tow when he needs it. God bless you! So long!"

And when the wisdom of the grand old sea-scout had been cheered to the echo, the eight members of the new patrol, rallying round their Owl flag, broke into the first verse of their song, a part of which Nixon had sung to them by the camp-fire in the woods:—

"No loyal Scout gives place to doubt,
But action quick he shows!
Like a knight of old he is brave and bold,
And chivalry he knows.
Then hurrah for the brave, hurrah for the good!
Hurrah for the pure in heart!
At duty's call, with a smile for all,
The Scout will do his part!"

"Sing! Harold. Do your part, and sing!" urged Nixon, the patrol leader. "Oh, go on: that is n't a scout's mouth, Harold!" looking at the weak brother's fear-tightened lips. "A scout's mouth turns up at the corners. Smile, Harold! Smile and sing."

A minute later Scout Warren's own features were wreathed by a smile, humorous, moved, glad — more glad than any which had illumined his face hitherto — for by his side the boy who

had once feared the stars as they stole out above the clearing, was singing after him: —

> "Hurrah for the sun, hurrah for the storm!
> Hurrah for the stars above!"

"He's going to make a good scout, some time; don't you think so, Cap?" Nixon, glancing down at the timid "poltron," nudged Captain Andy's arm.

"Aye, aye! lad, I guess he will, when you've put some more backbone into him," came the optimistic answer.

But Captain Andy's gaze did not linger on Harold. The keen search-light of his glance was trained upon Leon — upon Corporal Chase, who, judging by the new and lively purpose in his face, had to-night, indeed, through the channel of his scout oath, "deepened the water in which he floated," as he stood holding high the royal-blue banner of the Owl Patrol.

CHAPTER IX

GODEY PECK

That stirring initiation meeting was the forerunner of others thereafter held weekly in the small town hall, when the members of the new patrol had their bodies developed, stiffened into manly erectness by a good drill and various rousing indoor games, while their minds were expanded by the practice of various new and exciting "stunts" as Leon called them.

To Starrie Chase the most interesting of these in which he soon became surprisingly proficient was the flag-signaling, transmitting or receiving a message to or from a brother scout stationed at the other end of the long hall. Spelling out such a message swiftly, letter by letter, with the two little red and white flags, according to either the semaphore or American Morse code, had a splendid fascination for him.

More exciting still was it when on some dark fall evening, at the end of the Saturday afternoon hike, he gathered with his brother scouts around a blazing camp-fire on the uplands, with

the pale gray ribbon of the tidal river dimly unrolling itself beyond the low-lying marshes, and the scoutmaster would suggest that he should try some outdoor signaling to another scout stationed on a distant hillock, using torches, two red brands from the fire, one in each hand, instead of the regulation flags.

"Oh! but this is in-ter-est-ing; makes a fellow feel as if he were 'going some'!" Starrie would declare to himself in an ecstatic drawl, as, first his right arm, then his left, manipulated the rosy firebrands, while his keen eyes could barely discern the black silhouette of his brother Owl's figure on its distant mound, as he spelled out a brief message.

It certainly was "going." There was progress here: exciting progress. Growth which made the excitement squeezed out of his former pranks seem tame and childish!

And more than one resident of the neighborhood—including Dave Baldwin's old mother, who lived alone in her shallow, baldfaced house, almost denuded of paint by the elements, at a bleak point where upland and salt-marsh met—drew a free breath and thanked God for a respite.

In addition to the indoor signaling there were

talks on first-aid to the injured by the busy doctor and on seamanship by Captain Andy whose big voice had a storm-burr clinging to it in which, at exciting moments, an intent ear could almost catch the echo of the gale's roar, of raging seas, shrieking rigging and slatting sails—all the wild orchestra of the storm-king.

Then there were the Saturday hikes, and once in a while the week-end camping-out in the woods from Friday evening to Saturday night, whenever Scoutmaster Estey, Colin's much-admired brother, could obtain a forenoon holiday, in addition to the customary Saturday afternoon, from the office where he worked as naval architect, or expert designer of fishing-vessels, in connection with a shipbuilding yard on the river.

A notable figure in relation to the scouts' outdoor life was Toiney Leduc, the French-Canadian farmhand. As time progressed he became an inseparable part of it.

For Harold, the abnormally timid boy, for whom it was hoped that the new movement would do much, was inseparable from him: Harold would not come to scout meeting or march on hike without Toiney, although with his brother Owls and their scoutmaster he was already

beginning to emerge from his shadowy fears like a beetle from the grub.

In time he would no doubt fully realize what impotent bugaboos were his vague terrors, and would be reconciled to the world at large through the medium of the Owl Patrol.

Already there was such an improvement in his health and spirits that his grandfather raised Toiney's wages on condition that he would consent to work all the year round on the little farm-clearing, and no longer spend his winters at some loggers' camp, tree-felling, in the woods.

Moreover Old Man Greer, to whom the abnormal condition of his only grandson had been a sore trial, was willing and glad to spare Toiney's services as woodland guide to the boy scouts, including Harold, whenever they were required for a week-end excursion.

And so much did those eight scouts learn from this primitive woodsman, who could not command enough English to say "Boo!" straight, according to Leon, but who understood the language and track-prints of bird and animal as if they the shy ones had taught him, that by general petition of all members of the new patrol, Toiney was elected assistant scoutmaster, and duly

received his emblazoned certificate from headquarters.

His presence and songs lent a primitive charm to many a camp-fire gathering; no normal boy could feel temporarily dull in his company, for Toiney, besides being an expert in woodlore and a good trailer, was essentially a *bon enfant*, or jolly child, at heart, meeting every experience with the blithe faith that, somehow — somewhere — he would come out on top.

In the woods his songs were generally inaudible, locked up in his heart or throat, though occasionally they escaped to his lips which would move silently in a preliminary canter, then part to emit a gay bar or two, a joyous "Tra la la . . . la!" or: —

"Rond', Rond', Rond', peti' pie pon' ton'!"

But on these occasions the strain rarely soared above a whisper and was promptly suspended lest it should startle any wild thing within hearing, while he led his boy scouts through the denser woods with the skill and stealth of the Indian whose wary blood mingled very slightly with the current in his veins.

Those were mighty moments for the young scoutmaster and members of the Owl Patrol

when they "lay low," crouching breathlessly in some thicket, with Toiney, prostrate on his face and hands, a little in advance of them, his black eyes intent upon a fox-path, a mere shadow-track such as four of their number had seen on that first memorable day in the woods, where only the lightly trampled weeds or an occasional depression in some little bush told their assistant scoutmaster, whom nothing escaped, that some airy-footed animal was in the habit of passing there from burrow to hunting-ground.

The waiting was sometimes long and the enforced silence irksome to youthful scouts; there were times when it oppressed one or other of the boys like a steel cage against the bars of which his voice, like a rebellious bird, dashed itself in some irrepressible sound, a pinched-off cry or smothered whistle.

But that always drew a backward hiss of "Mak' you s-silent! W'at for you spik lak dat?" from the advance scout, Toiney, or a clipped, sarcastic "*T'as pas besoin* to shoutee — engh?"

And the needless semi-shout was repressed next time by the reprimanded one, many a lesson in self-control being learned thereby.

More than once patience was at last rewarded

"MAK' YOU S-SILENT! W'AT FOR YOU SPIK LAK DAT?"

by a glimpse of the trotting traveler, the sly red fox, maker of that shadow-path: of its sandy coat, white throat, large black ears, and the bushy, reddish tail, with milk-white tip, the "flag" as woodsmen call it.

Instinctively on such occasions Leon at first yearned for his gun, his old "fuzzee," with which he had worked havoc — often purposeless and excessive — among shore birds, and from which he had to part when he enlisted in the Boy Scouts of America, and adopted principles tending toward the conservation of all wild life rather than to destruction.

Gradually, however, Starrie Chase, like his brother scouts, came under the glamour of this peaceful trailing. He began to discover a subtler excitement, more spicy fun — the spicier for Toiney's presence — in the brief contemplation of that dog-fox at home, trotting along, unmolested, to his hunting-ground, than in past fevered glimpses of him when all interest in his wiles and habits was merged into greed for his skin and tail.

Many were the opportunities, too, for a glimpse at the white flag of the shy deer as it bounded off into some deeper woodland glade, and for being thrilled by the swift drumming of the

partridge's wings when it rose from its dusting-place on the ground or on some old log whose brown, flaky wood could be reduced to powder; or from feasting on the brilliant and lowly partridge-berries which, nestling amid their evergreen leaves, challenged November's sereness.

Each woodland hike brought its own revelation — its special discovery — insignificant, perhaps — but which thereafter stood out as a beauty spot upon the face of the day.

The hikes were generally conducted after this manner: seven of the Owls with their tall scoutmaster would leave the town bright and early on a Saturday morning, a goodly spectacle in their khaki uniforms, and, staff in hand, take their way through the woods to the little farm-clearing where they were reinforced by the assistant scoutmaster in his rough garb — Toiney would not don the scout uniform — and by Harold, the still weak brother.

Their coming was generally heralded by modified shouting. And the impulsive Toiney would suspend some farm task and stand erect with an explosive "*Houp-là!*" tickling his throat, to witness that most exhilarating of present-day sights, a party of boy scouts emerging from the woods into a clearing, with Mother Nature in the guise

of the early sunshine rushing, open-armed, to meet them, as if welcoming her stray children back to her heart.

Then Toiney, as forest guide, would assume the leadership of the party, and not only was his thorough acquaintance with "de bird en de littal wil' an-ni-mal" valuable; but his fund of knowledge about "heem beeg tree," and the uses to which the different kinds of wood could be put, seemed broad and unfailing, too.

The most exciting discovery of that season to the boys was when he pointed out to them one day the small hole or den amid some rocky ledges near Big Swamp where the Mother Coon — as sometimes happens, though she generally prefers a hollow tree — had brought forth her intrepid offspring; both the one which had raided Toiney's hencoop, and Raccoon Junior who had come to a warlike issue with the crows.

Toiney, as he explained, had investigated that deep hole amid the ledges when the woods were green with spring, and had discovered some wild animal which by its size and general outline he knew to be a coon, crouching at the inner end of it, with her young "littal as small cat." He had beaten a hasty retreat, not willing to provoke a possible attack from the mother

rendered bold by maternity, or to disturb the infant family.

He was radiant at finding the coon's rocky home again, though tenantless, now.

"Ha! I'll know we fin' heem den"; he beamed upon his comrades with primitive conceit. "We arre de boy — engh? We arre de bes' scout ev'ry tam!"

And that was the aim of each member of the Owl Patrol, with the exception, perhaps, of Harold, not indeed to be the "best scout," but to figure as the equal in scoutcraft of any lad of his age and a corresponding period of service, in the United States. To this end he drilled, explored and studied, somewhat to the mystification of boys who still held aloof from the scout movement!

"Where are ye off to, Starrie?" inquired Godey Peck, a youth of this type, one fair November afternoon, intercepting Leon about an hour after school had closed. "Don't you want to come along with me? I'm going down to Stanway's shipyard to have a look at the new vessel that they 're going to launch at daybreak to-morrow. She's all wedged up on the ways, ready to go. Say!" Godey edged slyly nearer to Leon, "us boys — Choc Latour, Benjie Lane an' me — have hit on a plan for being launched

in her. You know they won't allow boys to be aboard, if they know it, when she shoots off the launching ways. But those ship carpenters 'll have to rise bright and early if they want to get ahead of us! See?"

Godey laid a forefinger against the left side of his nose, to emphasize a high opinion of his own subtlety.

"How are you going to work it?" Leon asked briefly.

"Why! there 's a vessel 'most built on the stocks right 'longside the finished hull. Us boys are going to wake very early, trot down to the shipyard before any of the workmen are around; then we 'll shin up the staging an' over the half-built vessel right onto the white deck o' the new one that 's waiting to be launched. 'T will be easy to drop below into the cabin an' hide under the bunks until the time comes for launching her. When we hear 'em knocking out the last block from under her keel — when she 's just beginning to crawl — then we 'll pop up an' be on deck when she 's launched; see?"

"Ho! So you're going to do the stowaway act, eh?" Starrie Chase, with that characteristic snap of his brown eyes, seemed to be taking a mental photograph of the plan.

"Only for an hour or two. You want to be in this too; don't you, Starrie?"

Leon was silent, considering. The underhand scheme ran counter to the aboveboard principles of the scout law which he had sworn to obey; of that he felt sure. "On my honor I will do my best . . . to keep myself morally straight!" Voluntarily and enthusiastically he had taken the chivalrous oath, and he was "too much of a fellow" to go back on it deliberately.

"No! I don't want to play stowaway," he answered after a minute. "'It 's a crazy plan anyhow! Give it up, Gode! Likely enough you 'll scratch up the paint of the new cabin with your boots, skulking there all three of you — then there 'll be a big row; and 't would seem a pity, too, after all the months it has taken to build an' paint that dandy new hull."

Such a view would scarcely have presented itself to Leon two months ago; he certainly was "deepening the water" in which he floated.

"Well, let 's pop down to the shipyard anyhow, an' see her!" urged Godey, hoping that a contemplation of the new vessel, airily wedged high on the launching ways, with her bridal deck white as a hound 's tooth, would weaken the other's resolution.

"No, I 'll be down there to-morrow morning, on the river-slip, to see her go. But I want to do something else this afternoon. I 'm going home to study."

"What?"

"Flag-signaling in the Boy Scout Handbook. I can send a message by semaphore now, twenty letters per minute; I must get it down to sixteen before I can pass the examination for first-class scout!" Starrie threw this out impetuously, his face glowing. "We 're going to have an outdoor test in some other things this evening — if I pass it I 'll be a second-class scout. I don't want to be a tenderfoot for ever! Say! but the signaling gets me; it 's so interesting: I 'm beginning to study the Morse code now."

"Pshaw! You boy scouts jus' make me tired." Godey leaned against the parapet of the broad bridge above the tidal river whereon the boys stood, as if the contemplation of so much energy ambitiously directed was too much for him. "Here comes another of your kind now!"

He pointed to Colin Estey who came swinging along out of the distance, his quick springy step and upright carriage doing credit to the scouts' drill.

Colin halted ere crossing the bridge to hail a

street-car for an old gentleman who was making futile attempts to stop it, and then courteously helped him to the platform.

Godey shook his head over the action. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he crowed scornfully. "Ain't we acting hifalutin?"

Yet there was nothing at all bombastic about the simple good turn or in Colin's bright face as he joined the other scout upon the bridge and marched off homeward with him, their rhythmic step and erect carriage attracting the attention of more than one adult pedestrian.

Godey lolled on the parapet, looking after them, racking his brain for some derisive epithet to hurl at their backs; he longed to shout, "Sissies!" and "Spongecakes!" But such belittling terms clearly did n't apply.

The only mocking shaft in his quiver that would come anywhere near hitting the mark of those well-drilled backs — straight as a rod — was one which even he felt to be feeble: —

"Oh! you Tin Scouts," he shouted maliciously. "Tin Soldiers! *Tin Scouts!*" sustaining the cry until the two figures disappeared from view in the direction of the Chase homestead.

CHAPTER X

THE BALDFACED HOUSE

But Leon did not study signaling and the Morse alphabet that afternoon. He was presently dispatched by his father, who owned a pleasant home on the outskirts of the town, on an errand to a farm some two miles distant on the uplands that skirted the woods.

The afternoon had all the spicy beauty of early November, with a slight frost in the air. The fresh breeze laughed like a tomboy as it romped over the salt-marshes. Each eddying dimple in the tidal river shone like a star sapphire, while the broad, brackish channel wound in and out between the marshes with as many wriggles as a lively trout.

"Those little creeks look like runaways," thought Leon as he paused upon the uplands and beamed down upon the wide panorama of golden marsh-land and winding water. "They 're for all the world like schoolboys that have cut school, giggling an' running to hide!" His eye dreamily followed the course of many a truant

creek that half-turned its head, looking under the tickling sunbeams as if it were glancing back over its shoulder, while it burrowed into the marshes vainly trying to hide where the relentless schoolmaster, called, for want of a better name, Solar Attraction, might not find it and compel its return to the ocean.

"And the Sugarloaf Sand-Dunes; don't they look fine?" reflected the boy scout further, his eye traveling off downstream to where the curving tidal channel broadened into pearly plains of water, bounded at one distant point, near the juncture of river and sea, by a dazzlingly white beach.

There the fine colorless sand, which when viewed closely had very much the hue of skim milk, the white being shot with a faint gray-blue tinge, had been piled by the winds of ages into tall sand-hills, into pyramids and columns: one dazzling pillar, in especial, being named the Sugarloaf from its crystalline whiteness, had given its name to the whole expanse of dune and beach.

The tall Sugarloaf gleamed in the distance now like a snowy lighthouse whose lamps are sleeping, presiding over the mouth of the tidal river; its brother sand-hills capped by vegetation

might have been the pure bright cliffs of some fairy shore.

The boy scout stood for many minutes upon the uplands, gazing afar, his mouth open as if he were physically drinking in that distant beauty.

"Gee whiz! this is gr-reat; is n't it, Blinkie?" he murmured to the squatting dog by his side. "I never before saw that old Sugarloaf look as it does to-day; did you, Mr. Dog?"

It had appeared just as radiantly beautiful, off and on, during all the seasons of Leon's life. But his powers of observation had not been trained as was the case of late. In the years prior to his becoming a scout, when his inseparable companion on uplands and marsh had been a shotgun — from the time he was permitted free use of one — and the all-absorbing idea in his mind how to contrive a successful shot at shore bird or animal, he had gone about "lak wit' eye shut," so far as many things just now beginning to fill him with a wonderful, speechless gladness were concerned.

"Well, we 're not heading for that farmhouse, are we, pup?" he said at length, turning from the contemplation of runaway creeks and radiant dunes to the completion of his father's errand.

But the sunlit beauty at which he had been

gazing coursed through his every vein, finding vent in a curly, ecstatic whistle that ascended in spirals until it touched the high keynote of exultation and there hung suspended; while the rest of the trip to that upland farmhouse was accomplished in a series of broad jumps, the terrier being as wild with delight as his master.

The errand performed and the boy scout having put in half an hour condescendingly amusing the farmer's two small children, while Blink exchanged compliments with his kind, master and dog started upon the return walk.

"Oh! it 's early yet; don't you want to come a little way into the woods, doggie?" said Leon, doubling backward after they had taken a few steps. "We have n't had many runs together lately. Your nose has been out of joint; poor pup!" stooping to caress the terrier. "Toiney says we can't take you on our scout hikes, because you 'd scare every 'littal wil' an-ni-mal' within a mile. You would, too; would n't you? But there 's an outdoor scout meeting to-night to be held over in Sparrow Hollow, each fellow lighting his own camp-fire — using not more than two matches — and cooking his own supper. And you may come. Yes, I said you might come!" as the dog, gyrating like a feather,

seized his coat-sleeve between strong white teeth in his eagerness not to be excluded from any more fun that might be afoot.

They were soon on the sere skirts of the woodland, prancing through leafy drifts.

"We can't go far," said Leon. "We must get back to the town and buy our half-pound of beefsteak that we 're to cook without the use of any ordinary cooking-utensil, and so pass one of the tests for becoming a second-class scout. I 'll divvy up with you, pup! But whew! is n't this just fine? . . . The woods in November can put it all over the September woods to my mind."

He added the last words to himself. There was something about the rugged strength of the stripped trees, with the stealing blue haze of evening softening their bareness, about the evergreen grandeur of pine and hemlock lording it over their robbed brethren, about the drab, parchment-like leaves clinging with eerie murmur to the oak-tree, and the ruddy twigs of bare berry-bushes, that appealed to the element of rugged daring in the boy himself.

He could not so soon break away from the woods as he had intended, though he only explored their outskirts.

Dusk was already falling when he found him-

self on the open uplands again, bound back toward the distant town.

"The scouts are to start for Sparrow Hollow at six o'clock: we must hustle, if we want to start with them," he said to the dog. "The only way we can make it is by taking a short cut across the marshes and wading through the river; that would be a quick way of reaching the town and the butcher's shop, to buy our beefsteak," muttering rapidly, partly to himself, partly to his impatient companion. "The tide is full out now, the water will be shallow; I can take off my shoes and stockings and carry you, pup. Who cares if it 's cold?"

The boy scout, with an anticipatory glow all over him, felt impervious to any extreme of temperature as he bounded down the uplands, with the breeze — the freshening, freakish breeze — driving across the salt-marshes directly in his face, racing through every vein in him, stirring up a whirligig within, presently bringing waste things to the top even as it stirred up dust and refuse in the roadway.

"Hullo! there 's the old *baldfaced house*," he cried suddenly to the dog. "Here we are on our old stamping-ground, Blink! Wonder if 'Mom Baldwin' is doing her witch stunts still?

We have n't said 'Howdy!' to her for a long time; have we, pup?"

Slackening pace, for that fickle breeze was blowing away many things that he ought to have remembered, among them the lateness of the hour, he turned aside a few steps to where a lonely old house stood at the foot of the slope as the uplands melted into the salt-marshes.

It was a shallow shell of a dwelling — all face and no rear apparently — and that face was bald, almost stripped of paint by the elements. Just as storm-stripped was the heart of the one old woman who lived in it, and whom Leon had been wont to call a "solitary crank!"

To the neighborhood generally she was known as Ma'am Baldwin, mother of the young scapegrace, Dave Baldwin, who had so troubled the peaceful town by his pranks that he had finally been shut up in a reformatory, and who was now, a year after his release, a useless vagrant, spending, according to report, most of his time loafing between the white sand-dunes on one side of the river and the woods on the other — incidentally breaking his mother's heart at the same time.

She had lived here in the old baldfaced house, with him, her youngest boy, the child of her mid-

dle age, until his wild doings brought the law's hand upon him. After his imprisonment shame prevented her leaving the isolated dwelling and going to live with her married daughter near the town, though that daughter's one child, her little grandson Jack, possessed all the love-spots still green in her withered heart.

In her humiliation and loneliness "Mom Baldwin," as the boys called her, had become rather eccentric.

She had more than once been seen by those town boys — Leon and his gang — stationed behind the smeared glass of her paintless window, doing strange signaling "stunts" with a lighted lantern, whose pale rays described a circle, dipped and then shot up as, held aloft in her bony old hand, it sent an amber gleam over the salt-marshes.

"She 's a witch — a witch like Dark Tammy, who lived on the edge of the woods over a hundred years ago and who washed her clothes at the Witch Rock," whispered Starrie Chase and his companions one to another as they lay low among the rank grass of the dark marshes, spying upon her. "She 's a witch, working spells with that lantern!"

Older people surmised that she was signaling

to her vagabond son, who might be haunting the distant marshes, trying to lure him home; shame and grief on his account had half-unbalanced her, they said.

But the boys pretended to stick to their own superstitious belief, because, to them, it offered some shabby excuse for tormenting her.

Leon Chase in particular made her rank little garden his nightly stamping-ground, and was the most ingenious in his persecuting attentions.

He it was who devised the plan of anchoring a shingle or other light piece of wood by a short string to the longest branch of the apple-tree that grew near her door.

When the wind blew directly across the marshes, as it did this evening, and drove against that paintless door, it operated the impromptu knocker; the wooden shingle would keep up an intermittent tapping, playing ticktack upon the painted panels all night.

Sometimes Ma'am Baldwin had come to the door a dozen times and peered forth over the dark salt-marshes, believing that it was her vagrant son who demanded entrance, while the perpetrators of the trick, Leon Chase, Godey Peck and others of their gang — tickled in the meanest part of them by the fact that they "kept

her guessing" — hid among the marsh-grass and watched.

Hardly any prank could have been more senseless, childish, and unfeeling. Yet Starrie Chase had actually believed that he got some sham excitement out of it.

And to-night as his feet pressed his old stamping-ground beneath that apple-tree beside the house, while the wind raked the marshes and whipped his thoughts into dusty confusion, the old waste impulses which prompted the trick were mysteriously whirled uppermost again.

The mischievous tide rip boiled in him once more.

Just as he became conscious of its yeasty bubbling, his foot touched something on the ground — a hard winter apple. He picked it up and threw it against the house, imposing silence on his dog by dictatorial gesture and word.

There was a stir within the paintless dwelling. Through the blurred window-panes he caught sight of a shrunken form moving.

"Ha! there's the old 'witch' herself. She looks like a withered corn-stalk with all those odds and ends of shawls dangling about her. Ssh-ssh! Blinkie. Down, doggie! *Quiet, sir!*"

Leon's fingers groped upon the ground, where

twilight shadows were merging into darkness, for another apple. Since he enlisted as a boy scout mischief had been sentenced and shut up in a dark little cell inside him. But Malign Habit, though a captive, dies hard.

Those seeking fingers touched something else, a worm-eaten shingle blown from the old roof. He picked it up and considered it in the darkness, while his left hand felt in his pocket for some twine.

"Gee! it would be a great night for that trick to work," he muttered with a low chuckle that had less depth to it than a parrot's. "The wind is just in the right direction — driving straight through the house. Eh, Blink! Shall we 'get her on a string' again?"

The dog whined softly with impatience. Of late, in his short excursions with his master, he had not been used to such stealthy doings. With the exception of the trailing expeditions through the woods from which canines were debarred, movements had been open, manly, and aboveboard since the master became a boy scout.

But Leon had forgotten that he was a scout, had momentarily forgotten even the outdoor test in Sparrow Hollow, and the necessary preparations therefor.

His fingers trifled with the shingle and string. His brain going ahead of those fingers was already attaching the one to the other when — the paintless door opened and Ma'am Baldwin stepped out.

She did look like a wind-torn corn-stalk, short and withered, with the breeze catching at the many-colored strips of shawls that hung around her, uniting to protect her somewhat against that marsh-wind driving straight from the river through her home.

From her left hand drooped a pale lantern, the one with which boyish imagination had accused her of working spells.

It made an island of yellow light about her as she stepped slowly forth into the dusk. And Leon saw her raise her right arm to her breast with that timid, pathetic movement characteristic of old people — especially of those whom life has treated harshly — as if she was afraid of what might spring upon her out of the gusty darkness.

Not for nothing had Starrie Chase been for two months a boy scout! Prior to those eight weeks of training that feebly defensive arm would have meant naught to him; hardly would he have noticed it. But just as his eyes had been opened

to consider at length, with a dazzled thrill, that distant Sugarloaf Sand-Pillar and other of Nature's beauties as he had seldom or never contemplated them before; so those scout's eyes were being trained to remark each significant gesture of another person and to read its meaning.

Somehow, that right arm laid across an old woman's breast told a tale of loneliness and lack of defenders which made the boy wince. The distance widened between his two hands holding respectively the shingle and string.

There was a wood-pile within a few yards of him. Ma'am Baldwin stepped toward it, breathing heavily and ejaculating: "My sen-ses! How it do blow!" While Leon restrained the terrier with a "*Quiet*, Blink! Don't go for her!"

Ma'am Baldwin, intent on holding fast to her shawls and procuring some chunks from the wood-pile — nearsighted as she was, to boot — did not notice the boy and dog standing in the blackness beneath the bare apple-tree.

She set the lantern atop of the pile. As she bent forward, groping for a hatchet, its yellow rays kindled two other lanterns in her eyes by whose light the lurking boy gazed through into her heart and saw for a brief moment how tired, lonely, and baffled it was.

At the glimpse he straightened up very stiffly. There was a gurgle in his throat, a stirring as of panic at the roots of his hair.

But not scare produced the rigidity! It was caused by a sudden great throe within which scraped his throat and sent a dimness to his eyes. The captive, Malign Habit, imprisoned before, was dying now in the grasp of the Scout.

To put it otherwise, — at sight of an old woman's arm pathetically shielding her breast, at a startled peep into her heart, the tight little bud of chivalry in Leon, watered of late by his scout training, fostered by the good turn to somebody every day, burst suddenly, impetuously into flower!

With a low snarl at himself, he thrust the coil of string deep into his pocket, and flung the shingle as far as he could into the night.

"Ughr-r-r! Guess I was meaner 'n you 'd be, Blink!" he muttered, swallowing the discovery that sometimes of yore, in his dealings with his own kind, he had been less of a gentleman than his dog.

To which Blink, freed from restraint, returned a sharp, glad "Wouf!" that said: "I 'm glad you 've come to your senses, old man!"

"Hullo! 'Mom Baldwin,'" Leon stepped for-

ward as the bowed woman started at the monosyllabic bark, and peered fearfully into the darkness. "Don't you want me to split those chunks for you? You can't manage the hatchet."

Ma'am Baldwin's experience had taught her to distrust boys — Leon especially! As her peering eyes recognized him, she backed away, raising her right arm to her breast again with that helpless gesture of defense.

Starrie Chase blenched in turn. That pathetic old arm warding him off hurt him more at the core than a knockdown blow from a stronger limb.

But remembering all at once that he was a scout, trained to prompt action, he picked up the hatchet where she had dropped it, and set to work vigorously, chopping wood.

"Now! I'll carry these chunks into the house for you," he said presently. "Aw! let me. I'd just as soon do it!"

Ma'am Baldwin had no alternative. Leon pushed the paintless door open and carried the wood inside, while she hobbled after him, wellnigh as much astonished as if Gabriel's trump had suddenly awoke the echoes of the gusty marshland.

The scout went to and fro for another ten

minutes, splitting more chunks, piling them ready to her hand within.

Meanwhile his beneficiary, the old woman, seemed to have got a little light on the surprising situation. Grunting inarticulately, chewing her bewilderment between her teeth, she disappeared into a room off the kitchen and returned holding forth a ten-cent piece to her knight.

"No, thanks! I 'm a boy scout. We don't take money for doing a good turn." Leon shook his head. "Say! this old house is so draughty; you burn all the wood you want to-night; I 'll run over to-morrow or next day an' split some more. Is there anything else I can do for you before I go? You 've got enough water in from the well," he peered into the water-pail, which winked satisfactorily.

Ma'am Baldwin had sunk upon a chair, alternately looking in perplexity at the energetic boy, and listening to the frisky gusts: "My sen-ses! Whatever 's come over you, Leon?" she gasped; and then wailingly: "Deary me! if it should blow up a gale to-night, some things in this house 'll ride out."

"No, it is n't going to blow up a storm," Leon reassured her. "The wind 's not really high, only it gets such a rake over the marshes.

Here, I'll tie these old shutters together for you, the fastening is broken," and the coil of string was produced from his pocket for a new purpose. "But it must be *awful* lonely for you, living here by yourself, Ma'am Baldwin. You'll be snowed in later on; we'll have to come and dig you out."

Still chewing the cud of her bewilderment, she stared at him, mumbling, nodding, and stroking the gray hair from her forehead with nervous fingers. But there was a humid light in the old eyes that spilled over on the boy as he worked.

"Why don't you go to live with your daughter an' your grandson in the town?" went on Leon as he tied together the last pair of flapping shutters. "And you're so fond of little Jack too; he's a nice kid!"

"So he is!" nodded the grandmother; a change overspread her entire face now, she looked tender, grandmotherly, half-hopeful, as if for the moment trouble on behalf of her ne'er-do-well son was forgotten. "Well! perhaps I will move there before the winter sets in hard, Leon. I'm not so smart as I was. I'm sure I don't know how to thank you! Good-night!"

"Good-night!" returned the scout. "You

can untie those shutters easily enough in the morning."

And he found himself outside again upon the dark marshland, with the obedient terrier who had trotted at his heels during the late proceedings, waltzing excitedly at his side.

"Ah, la! la! as Toiney says, it's too late now, Blink, for us to put back to the town to buy our supper—half a pound of beefsteak and two potatoes, to be cooked over each one's special fire," muttered the boy, momentarily irresolute. "Well! we'll have to let the grub go, and race back across the uplands, over to the Hollow. Stir your trotters, Mr. Dog!"

As the two regained the crest of the hilly uplands, Leon paused for breath. On his left hand stretched the dark, solemn woods, where the breeze hooted weirdly among leafless boughs. On his right, beyond upland and broad salt-marsh, wound the silver-spot river in whose now shallow ripples bathed a rising moon.

Quarter of a mile ahead of him a rosy flush upon the cheek of darkness told that in the sheltered hollow, between a clump of pines that served as a windbreak and the woods, the Owls' camp-fires were already blazing.

"Tooraloo! I feel as if I could start my fire

to-night without using a match at all — just by snapping my fingers at it, or with a piece of damp bark and a snowball, as the woodsmen say," he confided half-audibly to the dog.

Whence this feeling of prowess, of being a firebrand — a genial one — capable of kindling other and better lights in the world than a campfire?

Starrie Chase did not analyze his sensations of magnificence, which bloomed from a discovery back there on the marshes of the secret which is at the root of the Boy Scout Movement, at the base of all Christian Chivalry, at the foundation of golden labor for mankind in every age: namely, that the excitement of helping people is vastly, vitally, and blissfully greater than the spurious excitement of hurting them!

CHAPTER XI

ESTU PRETA !

"HULLO ! here 's Starrie. Well ! it 's about time you turned up. We waited quarter of an hour for you before leaving town. — Hey ! Starrie, we 've got our six cook-fires all going. I only used two matches in lighting mine ; I 've passed one half of to-night's test. — So 've I ! Whoopee ! *I* ' went the jolly test one better ' : I lit my fire with a single, solitary match."

Starrie Chase, bounding down the grassy side of Sparrow Hollow, with these lusty cries of his brother Owls greeting him, stood for a moment in the brilliant glare of a belt of fires, as if dazed by the ruddy carnival, while his dog, making a wild circuit of the ring, bayed each bouquet of flames in turn.

"Yaas ; we 'll get heem littal fire light lak' wink — sure ! We ar-re de boy ! We ar-re de scout, you 'll bet ! " supplemented the merry voice of Toiney, the assistant scoutmaster, who, with the tassel of his red cap bobbing, and the flame-light flickering on his blue homespun shirt, was

on his knees before Harold's cook-fire, using his lungs as a pair of bellows.

"Hurrah! I 'm in this: I 'll light my fire with one match, too. Kenjo Red shan't get ahead of me: no, sir!" Corporal Leon Chase was now working like lightning, piling dry leaves, pine splinters, dead twigs into a carefully arranged heap in a gap which had been left for him in the ring of half a dozen fires kindled by six tenderfoot scouts, ambitious of being admitted to a second-class degree.

But he, the behind-time tenderfoot, was abruptly held up in his tardy labors by the voice of the tall scoutmaster, who with Scout Warren, the patrol leader of the Owls, was superintending the tests.

"I want to speak to you for a minute, Leon," said Scoutmaster Estey, with a gravity that dropped like a weighty pebble into the midst of the fun.

And Corporal Chase, otherwise Scout 2, of the Owls, obediently suspended fire- building, approached his superior officer and saluted.

"I 'd like to know where you have been for the last hour," began the scoutmaster with the dignity of a brigadier-general holding an investigation, while his keen eyes from under the drab

broad-brimmed hat searched Leon's face in the sixfold firelight. "Jimmy Sweet," nodding toward a squatting Owl, "said he caught a distant glimpse of you nearly an hour ago over on the edge of the salt-marshes near Ma'am Baldwin's old house. I hope you haven't been plaguing her again?"

The voice of the superior officer was all ready to be stern, as if he had visions of a corporal being requested to hand over his scout-badge of chivalry until such time as he should prove himself worthy of wearing it.

"Have you?"

"No!" Leon cleared his throat hesitatingly. "No," — he suddenly lifted steady eyes to the scoutmaster's face, — "I have been chopping wood and doing a few other little things for her; that made me late!"

A moment's breathless silence enveloped the six cook-fires. The face of the scoutmaster himself was set in lines of amazement: genially it relaxed.

"Good for you, Corporal!" He clapped the late-comer approvingly on the shoulder, and in his voice was a moved ring.

For, as he scanned the boy's face in the sixfold glow, he read from it that, to-night, Leon had

really become a scout: that, back there on the salt-marshes, the inner and chivalrous grace of knighthood, of which his oath was the outward and heralding sign, had been consciously born within him.

The scoutmaster was feeling round in his broad approval for other words of commendation, when Toiney's sprightly tones broke the momentary tension.

"Ha! dis poor ole oomans," he grunted, vivaciously pitying Ma'am Baldwin. "She 's lif' all alone en she 's burst she 's heart for she haf such a *bad boy*, engh? She 's boy, Dave, heem *canaille, vaurien* — w'at-you-call, good-for-nodings — engh?"

"I 'm afraid he is," agreed the scoutmaster regretfully. "Yet I pity Dave too. His elder brother went West when he was a little fellow; his father, who was a deep-sea fisherman, like Harold's father, was away nearly all the year round. Dave grew up without any strong man's hand over him; out of school-hours he had to work hard on a farm, and I suppose in his craving for fun of some kind he played all sorts of foolish pranks. After he left school and was old enough to know better, he kept them up — ran a locomotive out of the little railway station one night,

came near killing a man and was sent to a reformatory!"

"Bah! heem jus' vagabond — *errant* — how-you-say-eet — tramp-sonne-of-a-gun — *vaurien*, engh?" declared Toiney, gutturally contemptuous, while he poked Harold's fire with a dry stick.

"Yes, he's a mere vagrant now, loafing about the Sugarloaf Sand-Dunes and the woods; and likely to get into trouble again through petty thefts, so people say. When he had served his sentence he seemed to think there was n't much of a future before him, and did n't stick to the job he got. I pity his old mother! I think that every boy scout should make it a point to do a good turn for her when he can."

"Ah! *oui;* shes break in pieces, engh?" murmured Toiney, the irrepressible, still punching up the fire, to prepare it for the cooking tests.

Somehow, his eloquent sympathy sent a stab through Leon — whom everybody was at the moment regarding with admiration — for it brought a sharp recollection of an old woman backing away from him in fear, with her right arm laid across her breast in piteous self-defense.

"Gee! I wish I could do something more for

her than chopping wood — something that would make up for being mean to her," thought Corporal Chase, as he returned to his fire-building, arranging the fuel methodically so as to allow plenty of draught, and then triumphantly rivaling Kenjo's feat by lighting his cook-fire with one match.

The tiny, snappy laughter of that matchhead, seeming to rejoice that another baby light was born into the world, as he drew it along a dry stick, restored his towering good spirits.

"And now for the cooking test!" cried the scoutmaster. "Each scout to put his two potatoes to roast in the embers of his fire, and make a contrivance for broiling his beefsteak! And look out that you don't 'cook the black ox,' boys, as Captain Andy would say!"

"What do you mean by 'cooking the black ox'?" from two or three excited and perspiring scouts.

"Why! that's what the sailors say when their beef is burnt to the color of a black-haired ox," laughed the superior officer. "Scout Chase, haven't you brought any beefsteak and potatoes?"

"No, I meant to go back to the town for them an' meet you there. Blink an' I don't want any

supper; we 'll get it when we go home," returned Leon nonchalantly, swallowing his mortification at not being able to complete the outdoor test, this evening.

"Oh! I'll share my rations with you, Starrie," volunteered Colin Estey. "I shan't 'cook the black ox': I 'm too nifty a cook for that; trust me!" Colin was concocting a handsome gridiron of peeled twigs as he spoke.

"Don't mind him, Starrie: I could cook better when I was born than Col can now! I'll divide my beefsteak and 'taters' with you," came from another primitive chef, the offer being repeated more or less alluringly by every boy scout.

"Well! you 're a generous-hearted bunch," put in Nixon, the patrol leader, from his overseer's post. "But the scout-master and I have more than a pound of raw beefsteak here which we brought along for our supper. As I 'm not in these tests" (Nixon was now a full-fledged first-class scout) "I 'll cut off a piece for Leon so that he can cook it himself; I guess we can spare him a couple of potatoes too; then he can pass the test, with the others."

During the supper which followed while each scout, sitting cross-legged by his own cook-fire, partook of the meal in primitive fashion and

Toiney made coffee for the "crowd," more than one Owl shared in the opinion once enunciated by Leon that eating in the woods — or in a woodsy hollow such as sheltered them now from the breeze that drove keenly across the marshes — was the "best part of the business."

They modified that opinion later when the seven small fires, which had sputtered merrily under the cooking, were reinforced by logs and branches, and stimulated into a belt of vivacious camp-fires, each rearing high its topknot of crested flame, and throwing wonderful reflections through the stony hollow.

"I always wanted to be a savage. To-night, I feel nearer to it than ever before," said Colin, listening with an ecstatic shiver to the wind as it chanted among the pines that formed their windbreak, capered round the hollow, flinging them a gust or two that made the camp-fires roar with laughter, and then, as if unwilling to disturb such a jolly party, rushed wildly on to take it out of the trees in the woods. "And now for the powwow, Mr. Scoutmaster!" he suggested, looking across the ring of fires at his tall brother and superior officer.

"Hark! that's an owl hooting somewhere," broke in Coombsie. "It's the Grand Duke, I

think — the big old horned owl! One does n't hear him often at this time of year. He wants to be present at the Owl Powwow."

"Ah, la! la! I 'll t'ink he soun' lak' hongree ole wolf, me," murmured Toiney dreamily.

But the distant hoot, the deep "Whoo-hoo-hoodoo hoo," or "Whoo-hoo-whoo-whah-hoo!" as some of the boys interpreted it, from the far recesses of the woods, added a final touch of mystic wildness to the sevenfold radiance of the firelit scene which was reflected in the sevenfold rapture of boyish hearts.

And now the heads of human Owls were bent nearer to the golden flames as notebooks were drawn out containing rough pencil jottings, and scouts compared their observations of man, beast, bird, fish, or inanimate object, encountered in the woods, on the uplands or marshes, or upon the river during the past few days!

Kenjo Red offered the most important contribution.

"I went to Ipswich yesterday to spend the day with my uncle," he began, as he lay, breast downward, gazing reflectively into his fire. "In the afternoon we walked over to the Sugarloaf Sand-Dunes and lounged about there on the white beach, watching the tide go out. We did n't

see many birds, only a few herring gulls. But I 'll tell you what we did see: two big harbor seals and a young one, lying out on a sand-spit which the tide had just left bare. They were sunning themselves an' having a dandy time! One was a monster, a male, or big old dog-seal, my uncle said; he must have been nearly six feet long, and weighed about half a ton."

"More or less?" threw in the scoutmaster, laughing at Kenjo's jesting imagination. "Generally a big male weighs almost two hundred pounds, occasionally something over. Hereabouts, he is indifferently called the 'dog-seal' or 'bull-seal,' according to the speaker's taste; his head is shaped rather like a setter dog's, with the ears laid flat back, — for the seal has no ears to speak of, — but the eyes are bovine," he explained to Nixon, who knew less about this sea mammal than did his brother scouts, and who had never seen him at close quarters.

"Is n't it unusual to find seals high and dry at this time of year?" asked Coombsie. "In the spring and summer one sees plenty of them down near the mouth of the river, sprawling in the sun on a reef or sandbar. But in the late fall and winter they mostly stay in the water."

"Not when the river is frozen over — or

partially frozen," threw in Leon. "They love to take a ride on a drifting ice-cake, so Captain Andy says! Is there any bounty on their heads now, Mr. Scoutmaster?" he addressed the troop commander.

"No, that has been removed. The marbled harbor seal, so called because of his spots, was being wiped out, as he was wiping out the fish many years ago, before the Government put a price on his head. Now that he is no longer severely persecuted the mottled dotard, as he is sometimes called, — I 'm sure I don't know why, for I see no signs of senility about him, — is becoming tamer and more prevalent again. Still, he 's wilder and shyer than he used to be."

"Yes, there 's an old fisherman's shack on one corner of the Sugarloaf Dunes, where a clam-digger keeps his pails and a boat," said Kenjo. "He let my uncle take the boat and we rowed across to the sand-spit. The seals let us come within thirty yards of them: then they stirred themselves lazily, with that funny wabble they have — just like a person whose hands are tied together, and his feet tied more tightly still — lifting the head and short fore-flippers first and swinging them to one side, then the back part of the body and long hind-flippers, giving them

a swing to the other side. Say! but it was funny. So they flopped off into the water."

"Goodness! I wish that I'd been with you, Kenjo," exclaimed Scout Warren. "I have n't seen a harbor seal yet, except just his head as he swam round in the water, when Captain Andy took me down the river in his power-boat, the Aviator. We rowed ashore in the Aviator's Pill," laughingly, "in that funny little tub of a row-boat which dances attendance on the gasolene launch, but though we landed on the white sand-dunes and stayed round there for quite a while, not a seal did we see sprawling out on any reef."

"I 'll see heem *gros seal* on reever," broke in Toiney gutturally. "I 'll see heem six mont' past on reever *au printemps* — in spring — w'en, he go for kill todder gros seal; he 'll hit heem en mak' heem go deaded — engh?"

"Yes, the males have bad duels between themselves occasionally. But they 're mild enough toward human beings. However, my father had a strange experience with them once," said the scoutmaster, pushing back his broad hat, so that the sevenfold glow from the fires danced upon his strong face. "He 's told me about it ever since I was a little boy, and Colin too. When

he was a very young man he rowed down to the mouth of the river one day with some sportsmen who went off to shoot ducks, leaving him to dig clams and get a clambake ready for them on the white dunes. Well, sir! left alone, he pulled off to the clam-flats, drew up his boat, stepped out, and the tide being at a low ebb, set to work to dig up the clams which were here and there thrusting their long necks up from the wet sand, to feed on the infusoria — their favorite feeding-time being when it is nearly, but not quite, low water.

"The tide had receded altogether from the other side of the sand-flats, so that they joined the marshy mainland, and as my father landed he saw that there was a big herd of twenty or thirty seals lying out on those flats. It was before a bounty was set upon their heads, when they were very plentiful and tame. My father was not in the least afraid of them and was proceeding to dig his clams peacefully, when he suddenly saw that the whole herd was thrown into a wild panic by the discovery that *he* was between them and the water. They broke into a floundering stampede and came straight for him — or rather for the water behind him — at a fast clip, half sliding, half throwing themselves

along. A funny sight they must have been! Father says one big fellow came at him with his mouth wide open: the four sharp white teeth in front, two upper and two lower, shining. So Dad just turned tail and ran for the water as he had never run before; not waiting to jump into his boat, he plunged into the channel up to his waist!"

"But the seals would n't have attacked him, would they?" incredulously from Nixon.

"No; I think not. But he might not have been able to keep his feet. They would, perhaps, have struck him with their heavy bodies and knocked him down. And to feel a dozen or so of damp seals sliding over a fellow, their weights ranging anywhere from a hundred to two hundred and fifty pounds, would n't be a pleasant sensation, to say the least!"

"I guess not!" chuckled the Owls.

"I 'd like to catch a creamy pup-seal — is n't that what you call the only child, the young one? 'T would be fun to tame it," said Nixon. "Perhaps I'll get a chance to do so when we camp out on the Sugarloaf Dunes next summer. Are n't we going to have a camp there for two weeks during the end of August and beginning of September, Mr. Scoutmaster?"

"I hope so, if I can get permission from the landlord who owns the dunes."

"Maybe we'll run across Dave Baldwin too — the *vaurien*, as Toiney calls him — if he stays round there a part of the time?" This from Leon.

"That would n't be a desirable encounter, I'm afraid. Now! has any scout a suggestion to make that would be useful in planning our work for this winter?" Scoutmaster Estey looked round at the ring of boyish faces, reflecting the sevenfold glow, at Harold, lying on his face and hands, blinking dreamily under Toiney's wing, while the firelight burnished the latter's swarthy features beneath the tasseled cap.

"Mr. Scoutmaster!" Nixon Warren sprang to his feet impulsively, "Marcoo and I have a suggestion to offer,"—Nixon glanced at his cousin Coombsie,—"it has n't any direct relation to our work, but we humbly submit it as an idea that might be useful, not only to our boy scout organization here, but to the movement everywhere all over the world."

"Ho! Ho! What do you know about that? Out with it, Nix, if it's worth anything," came the dubious encouragement of his brother Owls.

"I must tell a little yarn first. The day before yesterday Marcoo and I were in Boston. We lunched at a fine restaurant. At a table near us was a gentleman — he looked like a Mexican or Spaniard — who could n't speak any English and addressed the waiter by signs. There was a boy with him, a classy-looking fellow of about fourteen, his son, I guess. 'I 'll wager that boy is a scout!' I whispered to Marcoo. 'His eyes take in everything, without seeming to stare about him much — and see the way he carries himself — straight as a string!'"

"So I suggested that we should try the scout salute on him as we passed out," struck in Marcoo. "We did! And fellows, he was on his feet like a flash, holding up his right hand, thumb resting on the little finger-nail, and the other three fingers upright, saluting back! We guessed then that he was a Mexican boy scout, traveling with his father."

"He seemed jolly glad to see us," Nixon again took up the anecdote; "just beamed! But he did n't apparently understand a word of English except 'Good-day!' not even when we passed the scout motto to him as a watchword: 'Be Prepared!' We might all three have been mutes saluting each other.

"We talked it over, coming home, Marcoo and I," went on the patrol leader. "And we arrived at the conclusion that it would be a great thing if our hearty motto, as Captain Andy calls it, could be taught to boy scouts all over the world, in some common form understood by all, as well as in their mother tongue. So that when scout meets scout of another country he could pass it on as a kind of bond and inspiration — together with the Scout Sign which is understood in almost every land to-day."

"So we looked it up in Esperanto — the only attempt at a world-language of which we know, and in which my father is interested." Marcoo leaped to his feet, too, as he excitedly spoke. "And it sounded fine! Give it to them, Nix!"

"*Estu preta!*"

"Estu preta! Estu preta! BE PREPARED!" One and all these present-day scouts took it up, shouting it to the seven fires, and to the wind which caught it from their lips like a silver feather to bear it away beyond the hollow, as if it would girdle the world with that hearty motto, in some universal form, as Nixon had suggested.

"Estu preta!" it was still on their tongues when, camp-fires extinguished, they marched

home. They flung it at each other in joyous challenge as they said good-night.

It entwined itself with the drowsy thoughts of the patrol leader from whom it emanated when he lay down to sleep, eclipsing his interest in the future summer camp, in marbled seals and cooing pup-seals — though such might not have been the case could he have foreseen how exciting would be his first glimpse of the "gros seal" at close quarters.

It mingled with Leon's dreamy reminiscences too, as the first ripple of slumber, like the inflowing tide, invaded his consciousness.

"Whew! this certainly has been a great day," he murmured, after repeating the Lord's Prayer with an elated fervor which he had never put into it before.

Yet there was one smirch upon the day's golden face in the sudden memory of an old woman shrinking away from him with uplifted arm.

"Gee! I wish I could do something for her beyond a few good turns." His drowsy tongue half-formed the words.

And like a silver echo, stealing through his confused consciousness came the automatic answer: "*Estu preta!* Live up to your able motto! Be Prepared!"

CHAPTER XII

THE CHRISTMAS BRIGADE

"ESTU PRETA!" During the days that followed, while the fall season was merged in winter, the Owls who had passed their outdoor tests in Sparrow Hollow, six of whom were tenderfeet no longer, but second-class scouts, did try to live up to their hearty motto. And this not only in the development of their strong young bodies by exercise and drill, so that every expanding muscle was under control, not only in the training of their mental faculties toward keen observation and alert action, but also in the chivalrous practice of the little every-day kindness to man or beast — almost too trivial to be noticed, perhaps, yet preparing the heart for the rendering of a supreme good turn!

Thus the Owl Patrol presently began to be recognized as a patriotic and progressive force. The Improvement Society of the little town sought its coöperation, and it soon became "lots more fun" to the boy scouts to lend a hand in making that too staid town a more beautiful

and lively place to live in than to pile — as had often been the case formerly — destruction on its dullness.

Under the direction of their energetic young scoutmaster they engaged in other crusades too, besides that against things ugly and retarding, in crusades for the rescue of many a needless and undue sufferer of the animal kingdom, their most noted enterprise along these lines being an attack upon the use of the steel trap among boys, especially those of the woodland farms, whereby many a little fur-bearing animal met its slow end in suffering unspeakable.

The use of this steel-jawed atrocity was bad enough in the hands of the one or two adult professional trappers of the neighborhood who visited their traps regularly. (And it is to be hoped that the Boy Scouts of America, who champion the cause of their timid little brothers of the woods, will some day sweep this barbarous contrivance altogether from the earth!) But its use by irresponsible boys who set the traps in copse or thicket, and, in the multitudinous interests of boydom, frequently forgot all about them for days — leaving the little animal luckless enough to be caught to suffer indefinitely — is a cruelty too heinous to flourish upon the

same free soil that yields such a fair growth of chivalry as that embodied in the Scouts of the U.S.A.

One or two of the Owls, who shall remain incognito, had possessed such traps in the past: now, they took them out into a back yard, shattered them with a hammer, relegated the fragments to a refuse heap, and instituted a zealous crusade against the use of the steel trap by non-scouts of the neighboring farms, such as Godey Peck and his gang.

There was a hand-to-hand skirmish over this matter before the Owl Patrol had its way; and the result thereof gave Godey cause for reflection.

"It has n't made 'softies' of 'em anyhow, this scout movement," he soliloquized. "They got the better *of us*. And they seem to have such ripping good times, hiking an' trailing! But—"

The demurring "but" in this boy's mind sprang from the proviso that if he enlisted in the Boy Scouts of America, he would be obliged, like Leon, to part with his gun. Also, from a feeling that he would be debarred in future from the planning of such lawless escapades as playing stowaway aboard an unlaunched vessel; a scheme, it may be said, which was never carried through, being nipped in the bud by watchful shipwrights!

Godey Peck was on the fence with regard to the new movement. And he did not yet know on which side he would drop down. Meanwhile from his wavering point of indecision, beset with discomfort, he soothed his feelings by renewed and vehement shouts of "Tin Scouts! Tin Soldiers!" whenever a khaki uniform and broad drab hat hove in view.

He had ample opportunity to air his feeble-shafted malice during the week preceding Christmas, for scouts, in uniform and out of it, were constantly to be seen engaged in "hifalutin stunts," according to Godey, which meant that they had been organized into a brigade by the scoutmaster for the doing of sundry and many good turns befitting the season.

It might be only the carrying of parcels, for a heavy-laden woman, who had visited a distant city on a shopping expedition, from the little railway station on the edge of the yellow wintry salt-marshes to her home! Or the bearing of gifts from a benevolent individual or society to some poor or solitary human brother or sister who otherwise might forget the meaning of Christmas.

It was on behalf of one such person that Corporal Leon Chase — detailed for duty on this

brigade — took counsel with his mother on the afternoon of Christmas Eve.

"You don't suppose that *she'll* stay alone in that old baldfaced house to-day and to-morrow, do you, mother?" he said, rather ambiguously. "The town authorities ought to forbid her living on there all by herself; she 'll be snowed in pretty soon if this cold snap continues. Why! the river is all frozen over — ice fairly firm too. I'm going skating by an' by."

"I 'd wait until it is a little more solid, if I were you," returned the mother anxiously. "You know our brackish ice is apt to be treacherous; the salt in the water softens it, so your father says, renders it more porous and unsafe. I suppose you were speaking of old Ma'am Baldwin. I don't see what the authorities can do. They can't force her into an institution; she owns that old house. And I don't know that her daughter's husband — little Jack's father — wants her in his home. It 's too bad that her son Dave should have turned out such a good-for-nothing! Trouble about him has aged her, I guess; she 's not as old as she seems."

Then Starrie Chase inveigled his dimpling mother into a pantry and, while she made passes at him with a rolling-pin, proceeded to whisper

in her ear — with a measure of embarrassment, for he was not accustomed to himself in the rôle of alms-bearer. But in a shadowy corner within him, once tenanted by Malign Habit, there still lurked a vision which sprang out on him at times, of an old woman raising her feeble arm to ward him off: it caused him to grit his teeth and mutter: "I wish I could do something more than to chop her wood occasionally!" And vaguely the mental answer would come: "*Estu preta!* At a time when you least expect it, you may find yourself up against the Big Minute!"

And in the mean time Starrie cornered his mother in the pantry — floury shrine of Christmas culinary rites! — and presently listened, well-pleased, to her answer: —

"Yes! I 'm glad that you put it into my head, son. I 'll pack some things into a basket for her, and you can take it across the marshes now. It must be bitterly lonely for her, poor old woman! And oh! Leon, as you 'll be in that direction, could you go on into the woods and get me some red berries for Christmas decorations?"

"Sure, mum!" And Leon stepped forth to speak to Colin Estey, who was awaiting him at the rear of the Chase homestead, exercising in a preliminary canter a new pedalomotor which Santa

Claus, masquerading as the expressman, had dropped at his home a little too soon.

"Take care you don't run into a tree, smash it up, and drive a splinter through your nose, as Marcoo did when he got his, last year!" admonished Starrie. "Say! Col, I can't go skating for a little while: I 'm bound for the woods first to get some alder-berries for decorations. Want to come?"

"Guess so!"

"You can leave that 'pedalmobile' here. Wait a minute! Mother 's just putting some Christmas 'grub,' mince-pies an' things, into a basket for old Ma'am Baldwin; we 'll deposit it at her door as we go along!"

"How 'd it be to write on it, 'Merry Christmas from the Owls'?" suggested young Colin whimsically: "that would keep her guessing; she 'd maybe think birds had come out o' the woods to feed her as they did Elijah or Elisha of old."

So a card was tacked to the basket, on which was traced with a stub-end of colored chalk the outline of a perching owl, highly rufous as to plumage, with the proposed salutation beneath it.

But the two Owls who placed the gift did not find the recipient at home. That baldfaced house

beyond the frost-spiked marshes was empty, its paintless door, half screened by the icy boughs of the wind-beaten apple-tree, fast locked.

"I guess she 's gone over to the town to spend Christmas Eve with her daughter," suggested Colin. "She dotes on her gran'son, little Jack Barry; he 's quite a boy for nine years old! What shall we do with the basket?"

"Raise that kitchen window an' slip it inside — the fastening 's broken!"

"Say! but you 're as barefaced as the house." Colin hugged himself with a sense of having got off a good joke as he watched Leon boldly raise the loose window and deposit the present within. "Let 's put for the woods now!" he added, the deed accomplished.

And the two scouts climbed the uplands toward those midwinter woods that crowned the heights in dismantled majesty.

But they were not robbed of beauty, the December woods: the frosty sunshine knew that as it picked out the berry-laden black alders displaying their coral branches against the velvet background of a pine, and embraced the regiment of hemlock bushes, green dwarfs which, together with their full-sized brothers, held the fort for spring against all the hosts of winter.

"Whee-ew! I think the woods are just dandy at this time o' year!" Leon led a whistling onslaught upon the vividly laden black alder bushes, while the white gusts of the boys' breath floated like incense through the coral and evergreen sanctuary of beauty, guarded by the silvery pillars of white birch-trees, where, in the bare forest, Nature had not left herself without a witness to joy and color.

"These berries are as red as Varney's Paintpot," laughed Colin by and by, as the two scouts retraced their steps across the salt-marshes, crunching underfoot the frozen spikes of yellow marsh-grass. "Well, we had a great time on that day when we found the old Paintpot — though we succeeded in getting lost!"

"We surely did! I wonder if the frost will hold, so that we 'll have some good skating after Christmas? It 's freezing now." Leon's gaze strayed ahead to the solid white surface of the tidal river, stained with amber by the setting sun.

They were within a hundred yards of it by this time, and caught the shrill cries and yells of boyish laughter from youthful skaters who careered and pirouetted at a short, safe distance from the bank. But a clear view of what was

going on was shut off from the two berry-laden scouts, crossing the saffron marshes at a leisurely pace, by some tumble-down sheds that intervened between them and the river.

"Well, the kids seem to be having a good time on the ice anyhow — though I don't think it can be very firm yet. Whew! what 's that?" exclaimed Colin suddenly, as a piercing cry came ringing from the river-bank whereon each blade of the coarse beach-grass glittered like a jeweled spike under the waning sunlight.

"Oh! *somebody* is blowing off the smoke of his troubles," laughed Leon unconcernedly.

The afternoon was so sharply delectable, with the sky all pale gold in the west, flinging them a remote, lukewarm smile like a Christmas greeting from some half-reminiscent friend, the hearts of the two scouts reflecting the beauty of the Christmas woods were so elated that they could not all in a moment slide down from Mount Happiness into the valley where danger and pain become realities.

But *now* a volley of cries, frenzied and appealing, rang out over the salt-marshes. Mingling with them — outshrilling them — came a call which made each scout jump as if an arrow had struck him.

It was the weird hoot of an owl uttered by a human throat, shrill with desperation, the signal call of the Owl Patrol — but with a violent note of distress in it such as to their ears had never sharpened it before.

"*Gee whiz!* Something's wrong — something's up! I'll wager 't was Nix Warren who hooted that time!"

Starrie Chase dropped his coral-laden branches upon the frozen ground.

"The Owls to the rescue!" he cried, and dashed toward the frozen river-bank.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BIG MINUTE

When Scouts Chase and Estey reached that frosty bank a confused scene met their eyes.

Before the tumble-down sheds some wildly terrified small boys were stumbling to and fro on the pale brink of the ice, floundering like river seals in their attempts to walk upon the skates which they were too distracted to remove, and shrieking at intervals: —

"He's drown-dr-rowning! Oh! he's *drowning*. Jack Barry 's drowning in the river!"

"Who's drowning? What's the matter, Marcoo? Has anybody gone through the ice?" questioned Leon sharply of the one older boy upon the bank, who turned upon him over a heaving shoulder the pleasant, ruddy face, empurpled by shock, of Coombsie.

"Yes, the ice gave way out there." Marcoo pointed to a wide hole thirty yards from the bank, where the dark, imprisoned water bubbled like a whirlpool. "Little Jack Barry has fallen through. Ice rotten there! Could n't reach him without a rope! Nix gone for it!" Coombsie

flung the words from him like broken twigs. "Here he comes now!"

Bareheaded, breathless, the patrol leader of the Owls tore toward the bank, in his hand a coil of rope. Behind him ran two distracted women from a near-by house; the drowning boy's mother and his grandmother — whose one unshattered idol he was — old Ma'am Baldwin.

She looked more like a ragged cornstalk than ever, that little old woman, thought Leon — in the way that trivial reflections have of being whirled to the surface upon the tempest of a moment like this — with all her odds and ends of shawls streaming on the icy breeze that skated mockingly to meet her. With her long wisps of gray hair outstreaming too!

And as she came she raised her right arm to her breast with that pathetic gesture familiar to Starrie Chase, as though to shield her half-broken old heart from the last blow that Fate might deal to it: as if she would defend the image it held of the drowning child, and therewith little Jack himself, from the robber Death.

Starrie's brown eyes took one rapid snapshot of the old woman in her quaking anguish, and his mind passed two resolutions: that the Big Minute had come: and that there was n't water

or ice enough in the tidal river to keep him from saving Ma'am Baldwin's grandson.

"Tie this rope round me! *Quick!* Bowline knot! I 'll try an' crawl out to him!" Nixon was shrieking in his ear.

"You can't alone! The ice is too rotten. You'd break through — and we might n't be able to pull you out that way. Must make a chain! I 'll go first. Crawl after me, Nix, and hang on tight to my feet!"

Corporal Chase was already lying flat on his stomach, working himself out over the infirm ice where, here and there, within the white map of lines and circles traced by the skates of the small boys, were small holes through which the captive water heaved like Ma'am Baldwin's breast, under a thin, glassy fretwork.

After him crawled Nixon, grasping his ankles in a strong grip. And, performing a like service for the patrol leader, came Coombsie, and after Coombsie Colin; the four forming a human chain, trusting their lives to the unstable, saline ice, and to the grip of each other.

"Hold on tight, Nix! I see his head. We 'll land him — yet!" Leon flung the last challenge between his set teeth at the white, porous ice and the little dark wells of bubbling water.

Worming his body in and out between those fretting holes, he reached the glassy skirts of the larger fissure which imprisoned little Jack. There the nine-year-old victim's hands clutched frantically at the jagged edges of the encircling ice, while his screams for help grew weaker. To Jack himself they seemed not to rise above the cold, pale ring that hemmed him in.

"*Hold — tight!*" The clenched word was passed along the chain as Leon at its head, hearing the tidal current beneath him sobbing, straining to be free, flung his hands out and grasped the victim's collar and shoulder, trying to lift him out of the hole.

But with a groan the brittle ice surrounding it gave way: the foremost rescuer's body was plunged too into the freezing, brackish water.

"We 'll both go now — Jack an' I — unless Nix hangs on to me like a bulldog!" was the thought that stabbed him as an ice-spear while the dark tidal current, shot with glints of light like cruel eyes, engulfed his shoulders.

But Nixon held on to his ankles, like grim death fighting grim Death himself. Not a link in that human chain parted, though the ice cracked ominously beneath it!

And Leon, half submerged, battling for breath,

clung steadfastly to Jack, as if indeed there was not water enough in the seven miles of tidal river to sunder them.

Presently, while his comrades backed cautiously, dragging upon the lower part of his body, his head and arms reappeared, the latter clasping Ma'am Baldwin's grandson.

A sob, half hysterical, burst from the gathering spectators on the bank.

"If — if the Lord had n't been with him, he could n't have hung on to him that time!" muttered Captain Andy, the old life-saver, who had limped to the scene.

And, indeed, it did seem as if the Lord was with Leon Chase and made his strength in this desperate minute — like that of one of the famous knights of the Round Table — as the strength of ten because his heart was pure! — Purified of all but the desire to help and save!

"Starrie 's got him! Starrie 's holding on to him!" came in an exultant cry from a group of boys rigid upon the river-brink; in their midst gleamed the face, pale and fixed as the ice itself, of Godey Peck; and from Godey's eyes streamed the first ray of ardent hero-worship those rather dull eyes had ever known — leveled at the Tin Scouts.

"Keep cool, boys! Take it easy an' you'll land him now!" shouted Captain Andy.

Afraid, for their sakes, to burden farther the ice with his massive body, he, too, stretched himself, breast downward, on the more solid crust near the bank, and seizing Colin's ankles directly they came within reach added another link to that human chain by means of which Jack's half-conscious body was finally drawn ashore and placed in his mother's arms.

"You saved him, Leon. I'll thank you as well — as well as I can — Leon!" quavered the grandmother's broken voice.

"Aw! that's all right," came in an embarrassed shiver from between the chattering teeth of the foremost rescuer, from whom the water ran in rivulets that would freeze in another minute.

"I'll forward the names of you four boys to National Headquarters, to receive the scout medal for life-saving!" proudly cried Scoutmaster Estey, who at this minute appeared upon the river-bank, while he plucked Jack's numbed body from his mother's shaking arms and set off at a run with it toward the nearest house.

Leon was hustled in the same direction by an admiring crowd.

But whence came that shrill challenge waking the echoes of the Christmas Eve? Did Godey's lips utter the cry: "What 's the matter with the Boy Scouts? They 're all right!"

And a score of throats gave back the answer: —

"Three cheers for the Boy Scouts of America! Three cheers — an' a tiger — for the Owl Patrol."

"Say, Mister!" Half an hour later, as Scoutmaster Estey issued from the cottage where, with the help of Kenjo Red and another scout, he had been turning his first-aid knowledge to account in the resuscitation of little Jack, he heard himself thus addressed and felt a hand pluck at his sleeve. Looking down, in the twilight, he saw Godey Peck.

"Say! it has n't made 'softies' of 'em, this scout business," declared Godey oracularly. "I want to be a scout too. Us boys all want to come in!" He glanced behind him at his gang who had constituted him their spokesman.

"Really? Do you *all* want to enlist in the Boy Scouts of America?"

"Sure! We want to come in now at the rate of sixty miles an hour, you bet!" Godey chuckled.

"Oh! well, if you 're in such a hurry as that, come round to my house to-night; we 're going to have a Christmas celebration there." And the tall scoutmaster walked off, laughing.

Thus on Christmas Eve did Godey drop off the fence on the side of the boy scouts, whose code of chivalry is only an elaboration of the first Christmas message: "Peace on earth, good will to men!"

CHAPTER XIV

A RIVER DUEL

With the enlisting of Godey and his gang, who mainly represented whatever tendency there might be to youthful rowdyism in the demure little town, the whole vicinity of the tidal river was won over to the Boy Scout Movement.

The new recruits, those who gave in their names on Christmas Eve as would-be scouts, together with one or two later additions, were formed into a second patrol, of which Godey became patrol leader, called the Foxes in honor of the commonest animal of moderate size to be found in their woods; the red fox being prevalent, too, among the white sand-hills, the Sugarloaf Dunes, that formed part of the wild coast near the mouth of the Exmouth River.

Those milky dunes, formed of pale sand which was popularly supposed to have drifted down from New Hampshire to the sea and to have been swept in here by the winds and tides of ages, were a sort of El Dorado to the boys of the little town far up the tidal river.

Pirates' treasure was confidently believed to be buried there; each lad who made the trip by steam launch, motor-boat, or plodding rowboat downstream for several miles to the dunes, was certain that if he could only hit upon the right sand-hill and dig deep enough, he would find its whiteness richly inlaid with gold.

Other wild tales centred about the romantic dunes, of smugglers and their lawless doings in earlier and less law-enforcing times than the beginning of the twentieth century.

It was even hinted that within recent years there had been unlawful importations at rare intervals of certain dutiable commodities, such as intoxicating liquors and cigars, by means of a rowboat that would lie up during the day in the sandy pocket of some little creek that intersected the marshes near the white dunes, stealing forth at night into the bay to meet a mysterious vessel.

The latest report connected the name of Dave Baldwin, the *vaurien*, as Toiney contemptuously called him, with this species of petty smuggling.

Wiseacres, such as Captain Andy and the doctor, were of opinion that no such lawless work could be carried on to-day under the Argus eyes of revenue officers. But it was known that Dave

spent most of his vagrant days hanging round the milky dunes and their neighborhood, sleeping on winter nights in some empty camp or deserted summer cottage, and occasionally varying the pale monotony of the dunes by sojourning in the woods at the opposite side of the river.

The possibility of running across him during a visit to the Sugarloaf Sand-Hills, or of seeing his "pocketed" boat reposing in some little creek where the mottled mother-seal secreted her solitary young one, had little interest for the boy scouts.

Toiney's contempt for the skulking vagrant who had caused his mother's heart to "break in pieces," had communicated itself to them. They were much more interested in the prospect of pursuing acquaintance with the spotted harbor seal, once the floundering despot of the tidal river, now scarcer and more shy.

As winter merged into spring a third patrol of boy scouts was formed, composed of boys from farms down the river, who had recourse to this harbor mammal for a name and called themselves the Seals.

Thus when April swelled the buds upon the trees, and the salt-marshes were all feathery with new green, there were three patrols of boy scouts

who met in the little town hall of Exmouth, forming a complete scout troop, to plan for hikes and summer camps; and to go on their cheery way out of meeting, ofttimes creating spring in the heart of winter by doing the regulation good turn for somebody.

In especial, good turns toward the sorrow-bowed old woman, Ma'am Baldwin, were in vogue that season, because a first-rate recipe for sympathy is to perform a service for its object. The greater and more risky the service, the broader the stream of good will that flows from it!

So it was with the four members of the Owl Patrol who had received the boy scout medal for life-saving — the silver cross suspended from a blue ribbon, awarded to the scout who saves life with considerable risk to himself — for their gallant work in rescuing the old woman's grandson from the frozen waters of the tidal river. Their own moved feelings at that the finest moment of their young lives were thereafter as a shining mantle veiling the peculiarities of her who, solitary and defenseless, had once been regarded as fair game for their most merciless teasing.

She was not so solitary now. Much shaken by the accident to her grandchild, she was in no fit

state to return to her baldfaced house on Christmas Eve or for many days after; so Public Opinion at length took the matter into its own hands and decreed that henceforth she must find a home with her daughter.

There, in a little dwelling on the outskirts of the town, she often watched the khaki-clad scouts march by. Invariably they saluted her. And Jack, the rescued nine-year-old, would strut and stretch and stamp in a vain attempt to hasten the advent of his twelfth birthday when he might enlist as a tenderfoot.

The Saturday spring hikes were varied by trips down the river when each patrol in turn was taken on an excursion in Captain Andy's motorboat. It was on such an occasion that Nixon Warren, who had begun his scout service as a member of the Peewit Patrol of Philadelphia, obtained his coveted chance of seeing Spotty Seal at close quarters.

"You stay round Exmouth during the spring an' summer, Nix, and I'll take you where you'll see a seal close enough for you to shake his flipper," promised the sea-captain; and he kept his word, though the pledge was fulfilled after a fashion not in accordance with his intentions.

It was a glorious day, when the power-boat

Aviator, owned by Captain Andy, left the town wharf with six of the Owls aboard in charge of the assistant scoutmaster, Toiney Leduc, and with the absurd little rowboat that danced attendance upon the Aviator, and which was jocosely named the Pill, bobbing behind them on the tidal ripples at the end of a six-foot towrope.

Spring was on the river to-day. Spring was in the clear call of the greater yellow-legs as it skimmed over the marshes, in the lightning dart of the kingfisher, in the wave of the tall black grass fringing each marshy bank, showered with diamonds by the advance and retreat of a very high tide tickled into laughter by the April breeze.

And spring was in the scouts' hearts, focusing all Nature's joy-thrills, as they glided down the river.

"*Houp-e-là!* I'll t'ink heem prett' good day for go on reever, me," announced Assistant Scoutmaster Toiney, his black eyes dancing.

And he presently woke the echoes, while they wound in and out between the feathery marshes, with a gay "Tra-la!" or "Rond'! Rond'! Rond'!" that seemed the very voice of Spring herself bursting into song.

"Goodness! I can hardly wait for the end of

August when our scoutmaster will get his vacation and we 're to camp out on the Sugarloaf Dunes," said Leon Chase. "You can see the white dunes from here, Nix. It 's a great old Sugarloaf, is n't it?" pointing across broad, pearly plains of water which at high tide spread out on either side of the central tidal channel, at the crystalline sand-pillar, guarding the mouth of the tidal river.

"The other sand-hills look like a row of tall, snowy breakers at this distance. Whew! are n't they splendid — with that bright blue sky-line behind them? I expect we 'll just have the 'time of our lives' when we camp out there!" came in blissful accents from the patrol leader.

"Well! we 're not going to land on the dunes to-day," said Captain Andy, who was standing up forward, steering the gasolene launch, his keen eyes scanning the plains of water from under his visored cap, in search of Spotty Seal's sleek dog-like head cleaving the ripples as he swam, with his strong hind-flippers propelling him along.

"Whoo'! Whoo'! she threw the water a bit that time; did n't she, lads?" alluding to his motor-boat, as the April breeze plucked a crisp sheet of spray from the breast of the high tide,

like a white leaf from a book, and laughingly threw it at the occupants of the launch. "But that's nothing!" went on the old skipper. "Bless ye, boys, I've been down this river in a rowboat when the seas would come tumbling in on me from the bay, each looking big as a house as it shoved its white comb along! 'T would rear itself like a glassy roof over the boat and I'd think it meant 'day, day!' to me, but I'd crawl out somehow. An' I've lived to tell the tale.

"But I'm gettin' too old for such scrapes now," went on the old sea-fighter. "I'm going to turn 'Hayseed!' You may n't believe it, but I am!" glowering at the laughing, incredulous scouts. "I'm about buying a piece o' land that's only half cleared o' timber yet, up Exmouth way; going to start a farm. But, great sailor! how 'll I ever get along with a cow. That's what stumps me."

"We 'll come out an' milk her for you, Captain Andy," volunteered with one breath the boy scouts, their merry voices ringing out over the mother-of-pearl plains of water, bounded on one side by the headlands of a bold shore, on the other by green peninsulas of salt-marsh, insulated at high water by the winding creeks that bur-

rowed among them, and farther on by the radiant dunes.

"I'll t'ink he no lak' for be tie to cow, me!" Toiney nodded mischievously at the sea-captain. Then, all of a sudden, his voice exploded gutturally like a bomb: "*Gard' donc! Gard' donc*, de gros seal! *Sapre tonnere! deux* gros seal. Two beeg seal! *V'là V'là!* shes jomp right out o' reever — engh!"

The excited Canadian's gesticulating hands drew every eye in the direction he indicated, which was a little to the left of the central tidal channel, between them and the straying creeks.

And the scouts' excitement fairly fizzed like a burning fuse as, mingled with Toiney's cry, sounded a hoarse bark, wafted across the plains of water, the harsh "Beow!" or "Weow!" according as the semi-distant ear might translate it, of an angry bull-seal.

Each boy's heart leaped into his distended throat at the sound, but not so high as leaped the bull-seal, to whom the other term significant of his male gender — that of dog-seal — hardly applied, for he outweighed half a dozen good-sized dogs.

Breathlessly gazing, the scouts saw him jump clear out of the water not quarter of a mile from

them, his sleek, dark bulk sheathed in crystal armor, wrought of brine and sunbeams — his flippers dripping rainbows! Down he came again with a wrathful splash that sent the foam flying, and struck his companion, an apparently smaller animal whose head alone was visible, a furious blow on that sleek head with one of his clawed flippers.

"*Gard' donc! Gard' donc*, les gros seal *qui se battent!* De beeg seal dat fights — dat strike heem oder, engh?" exploded Toiney again.

"So they are — fighting! Goodness! that big fellow is pitching into the one in the water. Going for him like fury, for some reason!" broke from the excited boys, as they stared, open-mouthed, while this belligerent performance was repeated, accompanied once or twice by the grunting bark of the larger seal.

"Great guns! he's a snorter, is n't he? You could hear that battle-cry of his nearly a mile off, at night, when the weather is decently calm as to-day," came from Captain Andy while he slowed down the panting motor-boat in order that the scouts might have a good view of the angry sea-calf — another name for the harbor seal — which Nixon yearned to see, and which was so absorbed in wreaking vengeance on a

flippered rival that it paid no attention at all to the approaching launch.

"Gee whiz! is n't he a monster?"—"Must be five or six feet long!"—"Can't he make the foam fly, though?"—"You 'd think he owned the river!" came at intervals from the gasping spectators.

"*Nom-de-tonnerre!* she 's *gros* seal: shes mak de watere go lak' scramble de egg — engh?" gurgled Toiney, mixing up his pronouns in guttural excitement over this river duel, such as he had witnessed once before, when two male seals contested for the favor of some marbled sweetheart.

In this case the duelists were evidently unevenly matched, for presently a wild cry came from Scout Nixon: —

"See! See! he has him by the throat now. That big fellow has his fangs in the other seal's throat! Must have! For he 's dragging him along to that little creek! He 's going to kill him."

"*Mille tonnerres!* I 'll t'ink shes go for choke heem, me: dat 's de tam he 'll go deaded sure — engh?" Thus Toiney came gutturally in on the excited duet, as seven strained faces peered over the motor-boat's side at the one-sided battle.

"*Mille tonnerres*"—"a thousand thunders"

— were being launched, indeed, upon the spotted head of the weaker animal, half stunned by the furious blows rained on him by the clawed hind-flippers of his adversary, and now finding himself dragged, willy-nilly, through the water into the secluded creek, like a prisoner to the block.

He tried diving, to loosen those cruel fangs, but was mercilessly forced to the surface again by his big rival.

"Well! I think this fight has gone on long enough; I 'm going to separate them," cried Captain Andy. "I guess the tide is high enough for us to overhaul them in that little creek, without danger of being pocketed, or hung up aground, there!"

And with a warning *chug! chug!* the power-boat Aviator made straight for the bubbling mouth of the creek, across the foamy wake left by the fighting seals, and dashed in after them.

Not until it was almost upon them did the triumphant male tear his four fangs from his rival's throat. Then, startled at last, he swam off a few strokes in a wild flurry, and dove, while Captain Andy drove his throbbing boat in between the combatants.

For a thrilling minute the scouts found themselves at the centre of a grand old mix-up that

churned the waters of the creek; the weaker seal, now half dead, was right beneath the boat. Presently his head appeared upon the surface a few yards ahead of it. Swimming feebly a short distance, he crawled out of the water a little higher up the creek and lay upon the marshy bank entirely played out.

His merciless rival reappeared too, to the rear of the boat, strong as ever, swimming rapidly for the creek's mouth and the open water beyond it.

"That seal is 'all in';" Nixon pointed to the victim. "If we could go on to the head of the creek, we might step out on the bank and have a good look at him."

"I can't land you from the power-boat, but you can get into the little Pill if you like, an' row up 'longside him." Captain Andy pointed to the tubby rowboat bobbing astern. "No! only three of you may go, more might capsize her; she ain't much of a boat, though she's a slick bit o' wood for her size! Easy there now! Steady!"

The sturdy Pill was drawn alongside. Scouts Warren and Chase, with one brother Owl, stepped into her, and rowed to the head of the creek, whence they had a near view of the half-throttled

creature as he lay, mouth open, stretched out upon the marshy bank, his strong hind-flippers extended behind him, their brown claws glistening with brine.

"Whew! he's spotted like a sandpiper's egg," said Nixon, looking at the head and back of the marbled seal. "Seems to me he's of a lighter color than the big fellow who nearly did for him; *he* looked almost black out of water — but then he was all wet. And what a funny little tail this one has, not bigger than a pair of spectacles!"

"See his black nose an' short fore-flippers!" whispered Leon. "Don't his eyes stick out? They're a kind o' blue-black an' glazy. There! he's noticing us now. He's trying to flounder off — with that funny, teetering kind o' wabble they have! Say! had n't we better row back to Captain Andy, and leave him to recover? He's all used up; that big one gave him an awful licking."

And this merciful consideration from Starrie Chase, who, prior to his scout days, would have had no thought save how to finish the cruel work of the big bully and put an end to the beaten rival!

"Well! you did see a harbor seal, Nix, 'most

near enough to shake his flipper, eh?" challenged Captain Andy as the three scrambled back aboard the motor-boat, and made the little Pill fast astern by its short towrope, while the Aviator bore out of the blue creek, to head upstream toward the town again.

"Yes! I'd have tried to do it too, if he had n't been so completely 'all in,'" laughed the scout. "I suppose we 'll have plenty of opportunities to see seals and listen to their barking when we camp out on the white dunes during the last days of August and the beginning of September. They say the young ones make a kind of cooing noise, much like a turtle-dove, only stronger; I 'm bent on capturing a pup-seal, to tame him!"

"Oh! you'd have no trouble about the taming, only you could n't feed him! But you 'll see seals a-plenty an' hear 'em, too, next summer. They just love to lie out on a reef o' rocks in the sun, when the tide 's low, especially if the wind 's a little from the no'thwest," said the ex-skipper. "A lonely reef, a warm sun, and light no'thwesterly breeze make up the harbor-seal's heaven, I guess!"

CHAPTER XV

THE CAMP ON THE DUNES

And when those fervently anticipated last days of August did in due time dawn, they brought with them many opportunities to Nixon and his brother scouts of watching Spotty Seal and his kindred in the enjoyment of their mundane paradise, whose pavement of gold was a wave-washed reef and its harpings the mild bluster of a northwesterly breeze.

During the final week of August and the first of September their scoutmaster, a rising young naval architect, had a respite from designing wooden vessels, from considering how he could best combine speed and seaworthiness in an up-to-date model; and he arranged to devote the whole of that holiday to camping out with his boy scout troop upon the milky Sugarloaf Dunes.

A more ideal camping-ground could scarcely have been found than among the white sand-hills, capped with plumy vegetation which formed the background for an equally dazzling line of beach, where the gray-and-white gulls strutted in feathered rendezvous, and were hardly to be scared

away by the landing in their midst of the first patrol of scouts, put ashore from Captain Andy's motor-boat in a light skiff, a more capacious rowboat than the Pill.

But they had brought the tubby Pill down the river too, in tow of the launch; and Captain Andy, who was partial to scouts, had arranged to leave that rotund little rowboat with them, so that, two or three at a time, they might explore the tidal river with the creeks that intersected the marshes in the neighborhood of the white dunes.

"Just look at that gray gull, will you?" laughed Patrol Leader Nixon, as he landed from the skiff. "He 's made up his mind that we Owls have no rights here: that this white beach is his stamping-ground, and he won't be frightened away!"

Other gulls had reluctantly taken wing and wheeled off during the prolonged process of landing the eight members of the Owl Patrol, with their scoutmasters and camp outfit, in various detachments from the launch, which was too large to run right in to the beach.

But this one youthful sea-gull, a mere boy in plumage gray, held his ground, parading the lonely beach with head turning alertly from side

to side, as if he were admonishing his wheeling brothers with: "These are boy scouts! Look at me: I tell you, you have nothing to fear!"

So bold was his mien, so peaceful the attitude of the human invaders, that presently the regiment of sea-gulls fluttered back to a point of rendezvous only a little removed from their former one.

"We won't have much company beyond ourselves and the birds, I guess!" remarked Nixon presently. "There are no houses in sight except those three fine bungalows about quarter of a mile off on the edge of the dunes. And the fisherman's shack on the beach below them!"

"Yes, that belongs to an old clam-digger," said Kenjo Red. "He keeps his pails there. Don't you remember my telling you about his letting us — my uncle an' me — have his boat one day last November, so 's we could row over to the sand-spit opposite, and take a look at some seals that were sunning themselves there?"

"Oh! yes, *we* remember, Kenjo; you 've told about that at half a dozen camp-fire powwows, at least." Starrie Chase plucked off Kenjo's cap and combed his ruddy locks with a teasing forefinger. "They say Dave Baldwin, the *vaurien*," with guttural mimicry of Toiney's accents,

"hangs out among the dunes here, when he is n't loafing in the woods up the river," added Corporal Chase, peering off among the white sand-hills, capped with biscuit-colored plumes of dry beach-grass, and the more verdant beach-pea, as if he expected to see young Baldwin's head pop up among them.

"I wonder if we 'll run across him?" said Nixon. "He can't 'make camp' among the dunes. Nobody is allowed to camp out here, without special permission. Boy scouts are privileged persons; they know we won't set fire to the brush."

"Oh! when he needs a fire — when he knocks a woodchuck on the head and wants to cook it — I suppose he rows over to one of those little islands there; they say he has an old rowboat here." Leon pointed to two small islets rising from the plains of water a little higher up the river.

"Well, I don't envy him!" Marcoo shrugged his shoulders. "He must have a bitter time of it in winter, when the river is frozen over down to the bay, an' you don't hear a sound here beyond the occasional pop of a sportsman's gun, or the barking of the seals — and even they 're pretty quiet in midwinter. Hey! Look at that spotted sandpiper. 'Teeter-tail' we call him: see his tail

bob up and down!" exclaimed Coombsie, who was an enthusiast about birds.

In watching the sandpiper rise from the white beach and dart across the water, in listening to his sweet, whistling "peet-weet!" note, speculations about the habits of the *vaurien*, the good-for-nothing young vagrant, were forgotten.

He, Dave Baldwin, faded completely from the campers' thoughts as the narrow skiff grounded its sharp nose for the fourth time on the beach, landing the remainder of their camp dunnage and commissariat; and the work began of selecting a site for the camp amid the milky sand-hills, interspersed with a few trees, slender and short of stature.

Those gray birches and ash-trees formed pleasant spots of shade amid the dazzling whiteness of the dunes. But there was other and more unique vegetable growth to be considered.

"Say! but will you just look at the cranberry patch, growing out of the white beach?" shrieked young Colin after an ecstatic interval, addressing no one scout in particular.

"Cranberries there near the tide!" — "Growing out of the sand!" — "Tooraloo!" — "Nonsense!" came from his brother Owls who were already getting busy, erecting tents.

But cranberries there were, in ripening beauty — as the workers presently saw for themselves — cranberries whose roots underran the dazzling beach, whose crimson creepers trailed delicately over its whiteness, whose berries nestled their rosy cheeks daintily, each upon its snowy pillow.

"*Gee!*" The one united ejaculation — the little nondescript, uncouth monosyllable which expresses so many emotions of the boyish heart, from panic to panegyric — was all that the scouts could find voice for in presence of this red-and-white loveliness secreted by Nature upon a lonely shore.

"Hey! fellows, Captain Andy is going," the voice of the busy scoutmaster broke in upon their bliss. "He's to bring the Foxes down to-morrow in his motor-boat," alluding to the Fox Patrol, of which Godey was leader. "The Seals will row over, to-morrow forenoon, from the other side of the river; so our scout troop will be complete. We owe a lot to Captain Andy. Don't you want to show him that you can make a noise: don't you want to give your yell, with his name at the end? Now, all in line, and together!"

And each scout with his arm around a comrade upon either side — Leon's clasping the back of Harold Greer who, a year ago, had cowered

at sight of him — all in a welded line, swaying together where the ripples broke upon the milky beach, they proved their prowess as chief noise-makers and made the welkin ring with: —

AMERICA
Boy Scouts! Boy Scouts!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Exmouth! Exmouth! Exmouth!
Captain Andy! Captain Andy! *Cap-tain An-dy!*

The weatherbeaten ex-skipper, standing "up for'ard" in his launch, which was just beginning its panting trip up the river, waved his hand in acknowledgment, while the Aviator's whistle returned a triple salute to that linked line upon the water's edge.

"They 're fine lads!" A little moisture gathered in the captain's narrowed blue eye as he gazed back at the beach — moisture which did not come in over the Aviator's rail. "Some one has spoken of this Boy Scout Movement as the 'Salvation of England' — as I've heard! So here 's to it again as the Future of America!" And he sounded three more whistles — and yet another three — giving the scouts three times three, until it seemed as if his power-boat would burst its steel throat.

Then comparative silence reigned again upon

the sands and certain startled birds resumed their feeding avocations, notably that white-breasted busybody, the sanderling or surf-snipe, called by river-men the "whitey."

"See! the 'whitey' does n't believe that 'two is company, three none': they 're chasing after their dinner in triplets! They run out into the ripples and back again, pecking in the sand, so quickly that the larger waves can't catch them: don't they, Greerie?" said Leon Chase, pointing them out to Harold in the overflowing brotherliness established by that yell.

Harold was no longer the "Hare." That nickname had been forbidden by the patrol leader of the Owls under pain of dire penalties. The "poltron," or coward, as Toiney had once in pity called him, was "Greerie" now; and was gradually learning what mere bugaboos were the fears which had separated him from his kind and from boyhood's activities — something which might never have come home to him thoroughly, save in the stimulating society of other boys who aimed earnestly at helping him.

"We 're going to have a splendid time here for the next two weeks, Greerie, camping among the dunes," Leon assured him. "To-morrow Nix an' you and I will go out in the little row-

boat, the Pill, and hunt up a creamy pup-seal and bring him back to camp for a pet. Now! you must come and do your share of the work — help to set up the other tents among the sand-hills."

One was already erected, a large canvas shelter, to contain four boys, another went up like unto it for the other four members of the patrol, then a smaller tent for the scoutmaster, and the cook-tent which sheltered the "commissariat," stocked with cans of preserved meats, vegetables, and all that went to make up the scouts' daily rations.

"Where are *you* going to sleep, Toiney?" asked Patrol Leader Nixon.

"Me — I 'll lak' for sleep out in de air, me — wit' de littal star on top o' me!" Toiney shrugged his shoulders complacently at the summer sky, now taking on the hues of evening, as if the firmament were a blanket woven for his comfort.

"Oh! I 'll sleep out with you. — And I! — Me, too!" Each and every member of the patrol, from the leader downward, longed to feel the white sand beneath him as a mattress, to have the stars for canopy, to hear the night-tide as it broke upon the near-by beach crooning his lullaby.

IN CAMP

"You may take it in turns, fellows — each sleep out with him one night, when the weather is fine," decided the scoutmaster. "Now! I'm going to appoint Scouts Warren and Chase cooks for to-night."

A first-rate supper did those cooks turn out, of flapjacks and scrambled eggs, the latter stirred with a peeled stick, while the great coffee-pot, brooding upon its rosy nest of birch-logs, grinned facetiously when a stray flame wreathed its spout, then broke into bubbling laughter.

Night fell upon the pale dunes that turned to silver monuments under the smile of a moon in its third quarter. A gentle, lowing sound came to the scouts' ears from the tide at far ebb upon the silvery beach, as, the cook-fire abandoned, they gathered round a blazing camp-fire that cast weird reflections upon the surrounding white hillocks.

The holding of a calm powwow on this first night in camp, when each heart was thrilling tumultuously to the novelty of the surroundings, was impossible. Toiney sang wild fragments of songs that found a suitable accompaniment in the distant, hoarse barking of the harbor seal, and in the plaintive "Oo-oo-ooo!" — the dove-like call of the creamy pup-seal to its marbled mother in some lonely tidal creek.

Once and again from the shore side of the scouts' camp-fire, from among the shimmering sand-hills, came the weaker, more snappy bark of the little dog-fox, as he prowled the dunes.

The dazzling Sugarloaf Pillar near the mouth of the river was wrapped in night's mantle. But lights flickered out in two of the handsome summer bungalows which the boys had noticed, standing at some distance from their camping-ground, looming high above the beach, erected upon stilt-like props driven into the sandy soil.

"Those houses were only built last spring; they 're occupied for the first time this summer," said Kenjo Red, who was more familiar with this region than the others. "Say! let 's chant our African war-song, fellows. This is just the night for it." And the barbaric chant rang weirdly among the sand-hills, the leader shouting the first line, his companions answering with the other three, to the accompaniment of the flames' crackle and the night calls of bird and beast: —

"Een gonyâma — gonyâma.
Invoboo!
Yah bô! Yah bô
Invoboo!"

Presently the bark of the dog-fox was heard farther off. *He* knew, the stealthy slyboots, that

he was not the only lone prowler among the pale dunes that night who listened intently to the boisterous revelry round the scouts' camp-fire.

His keen sense of smell informed him that behind one plumed sand-hill, between his own trotting form and the noisy company in the fire-light, there lurked a solitary man-figure.

But he, the sandy-coated little trotter from burrow to burrow, could neither hear nor interpret the sound, half groan, half oath, savagely envious, that escaped from the other night-prowler's lips as he listened to the boys' voices.

Silence, broken only by ringing snatches of laughter, reigned temporarily over the dunes. Then once again it blossomed into song:—

> "Hurrah for the brave, hurrah for the good,
> Hurrah for the pure in heart!
> At duty's call, with a smile for all,
> The Scout will do his part!"

And the soft purr of the low tide, with the breeze skipping among pallid dunes that looked like capped haystacks in the darkness, flung back the cheer for the "Scouts of the U.S.A."

"*Aghrr-r!*" snarled the testy dog-fox, his distant petulant growl much resembling that of Leon's terrier, who, unfortunately, was not present upon the dunes to-night. Blink had

already added the word "Scout" to his limited human vocabulary, but the wild fox had no such linguistic powers. The foreign music upon the lonely dunes was irritating, alarming to him.

It seemed to have something of the same effect upon his brother-prowler, upon the man who skulked among the sand-hills within hearing of the song: at any rate, the semi-articulate sound which from time to time he uttered, deepened into an unmixed groan that escaped from his lips again later when the clear notes of a bugle rang over the Sugarloaf Dunes, warning the scouts by the "first call" that fun was at an end for to-night, and sleep would be next upon the programme.

Then when lights were out, came the sweet sound of "Taps," the wind-up of the first day in camp, the expert bugler being Corporal Chase.

For the Exmouth doctor had kept his word: Leon had been given the "bugle" literally and figuratively since he enlisted as a scout, symbol of the challenge to all the energy in him to advance along new lines, instead of the "foghorn" reproofs and warnings that had been showered on him prior to his scouting days.

Then, at last, stillness reigned, indeed, upon the moonlit dunes.

The bark of the dog-fox melted into distance, becoming indistinguishable from the voice of the returning tide.

The man-prowler among the sand-hills slipped away to some lair as lonely as the fox's.

And Toiney, with Scout Nixon Warren wrapped in his camper's blanket beside him, slept out upon the white sands "wit' de littal star on top o' them!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE PUP-SEAL'S CREEK

The music of "Taps" was eclipsed by the blither music of "Reveille," the morning blast blown by Leon standing in front of the white tents, the sands beneath his feet jeweled by the early sunshine, the blue ribbon attached to his bugle flirting with the breeze that capered among the plumy hillocks.

The tide which had ebbed and flowed again since midnight — when the last excited scout had fallen asleep lulled by its full purr — broke high upon the beach, where the white sands gleamed through its translucent flood like milk in a crystal vase.

Far away in dim distance, higher up the tidal river upon its other side, beyond the plains of water, the woods which enclosed Varney's Paint-pot and the cave called the Bear's Den smiled remotely through a pearly veil of haze.

And all the waking glee of tide, dunes, and woods was personified in the boy bugler's face.

The sight of him as he stood there, face to the tents where his comrades scrambled up from cot or ground, his brown eyes snapping and flashing under the scout's broad hat, with the delight of having found an absorbing interest which stimulated and turned to good account every budding activity within him — that sight would have made the veriest old Seek-sorrow among men take heart and feel that a new era of chivalry was in flower among the Scouts of the U.S.A.

And the old religious reverence, that fortifying kernel of knighthood, was not neglected by this boy scout patrol.

Bareheaded, and in line with their scoutmasters presently, while their eyes gazed off over the sparkling dunes and crystal tide-stretches, they repeated in unison the Lord's Prayer, offering morning homage to the Power, dimly discerned, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things. Of his, the Father's, presence chamber, gladness and beauty stand at the threshold!

"*Now*, for our early swim! The tide's just right. Come along, Harold; I'm going to give *you* your first swimming-lesson; and I expect you'll be a star pupil!" cried Nixon, the patrol leader, when the brief adoration was over. "What! you don't want to learn to swim? Nonsense! You *are*

going into that dandy water. Oh! that's not a scout's mouth, Harold."

And the corners of Harold's mouth, which had drooped with fear of this new experience, curled up in a yielding grin.

Once he was in the invigorating salt water, feeling the boisterous tidal ripples, fresh and not too cold, rise about his body, the timid lad underwent another lightning change, just as at the moment of his tying the bowline knot, the spirit of his fisherman father became uppermost in him, and he learned to swim almost as easily and naturally as a pup-seal.

The improvement in his condition was such that his brother Owls had won his promise to enter school when it should reopen after this jolly camping period was over. "And if any boy picks on you or teases you, Harold, mind you're to let us know at once, because we're your brother scouts — and he won't try it a second time!" So they admonished him.

Thus Harold, under the Owls' sheltering wing, was gradually losing his inherited and imbibed dread of a crowd, of any gathering of his own kind.

Although this bugbear fear returned upon him a little when, later on that morning, the Fox

Patrol, with Godey Peck as its leader, was landed upon the Sugarloaf Dunes from Captain Andy's motor-launch, and still later in the day the Seals rowed across in two large rowboats from certain farms or fishermen's houses upon the opposite side of the river, to join the other two patrols. So that the boy scout troop was complete, and Harold found himself one of twenty-four boisterous, though good-natured, boys upon this strange white beach.

A little homesickness beset him for the farm-clearing in the woods and his grandfather's staid presence, to cure which Scouts Warren and Chase took him off with them in the little row-boat, the Pill, lent by Captain Andy, to explore the tidal river and the little truant creeks that escaped from it to burrow among the salt-marshes.

"We're going to try and hunt up a creamy pup-seal, Harold, and bring it back to camp," said Nixon; and in the excitement of this quest the still shy boy forgot his nervous qualms.

Fortune favored the expedition. It was now between one and two o'clock in the afternoon. The tide, which had been high at six in the morning and again at twelve, was once more on the ebb, as the two elder scouts rowing in lei-

surely fashion, turned the Pill's snub nose into a pearly creek whose shallow water was clear and pellucid, over its sandy bed.

Hardly half a dozen strokes had they taken between bold marshy banks when, from some half-submerged rocks near the head of the creek, they heard a prolonged and dulcet "Oo-oo-oo-ooo" that might have been the call of a dove, save that it was louder.

"*Hear him?*" cried Leon, shipping his oar in blinking excitement. "That 's our pup-seal, Nix! We 've got him cornered in this little creek; if he dives, the water is so shallow that we can pick him up from the bottom; and he can't swim fast enough to get away from us — though as likely as not he won't want to!"

The last conjecture proved true. The young seal, little more than two months old, which lay sprawled out, a creamy splotch, upon the low reef which the tide was forsaking, with his baby flippers clinging to the wet rock and his little eyes staring unwinkingly into the sunlight, had not the least objection to human company. He welcomed it.

When the scouts rowed up alongside the ledge he suffered Nixon to lift his moist fat body into the boat, where he stretched himself upon the

bottom planks in perfect contentment, and took all the caresses which the three boys lavished upon him like any other lazy puppy.

"Is n't he 'cunning, though?" gasped Harold, trying to lift the youthful mammal into his arms, an attempt which failed because he, the weak one of the Owls, was not strong enough to do so without capsizing the Pill — not because the pup-seal objected. "I thought he 'd be a kind of whitish color, eh?" appealing diffidently to Leon.

"So he was, when born; his hair is turning darker now, to a dull yellow; by and by it will be a brownish drab. See, Greerie! his spots are beginning to appear!" Leon ran his finger down the seal's dog-like head and back, already faintly dotted with those round markings which gain for his family the name of the "marbled seal."

"Is n't he a 'sprawly' pup, and so friendly? The other scouts will be 'tickled to death' with him —" Nixon was beginning, when a shadow suddenly fell across the boat and its three occupants, whose attention was entirely upon the young seal.

"Hi, there! You 'll get pocketed in this little creek, you fellows — hung up aground here — if you don't look out! Can't you see that the water is leaving you?" cried a harsh voice from the

bold marsh-bank which overhung the creek to the right of them, so suddenly that the three jumped.

Looking up, they saw the unkempt figure of a young man, short of stature and showing a hungry leanness about the neck and face. This sudden apparition which had approached noiselessly over the soft marshes, was plainly outlined against the surrounding wildness of salt-marsh and tideway.

Had the little dog-fox which prowled among the moonlit dunes been near, he might have recognized in the shabby figure his brother-prowler of the night before.

Recognition was springing from another source. Starrie Chase caught his breath with such a wild gasp that he rocked the Pill as if a gust had struck it. Something about that stocky figure and in the expression of the face, half wistful, half savage, reminded him overwhelmingly of an old woman whom he had seen issuing, lantern in hand, from her paintless home, and who had raised her trembling arm to her breast at sight of him, Leon.

"Forevermore! it's *Dave Baldwin*," he ejaculated in a whisper audible only to Nixon. "That 's who it is — Nix!"

"Don't you see that the tide is leaving you?" snapped the stranger again. "There won't be a teaspoonful of water in this creek presently."

He was looking down at the Pill and its occupants, with a gleam in his eyes fugitive and phosphorescent as a marsh-light, which revealed a new expression upon his mud-smeared face, one of passionate envy — envy of the boy scouts healthily rejoicing over their captive pup-seal.

"Tide leaving us! S-so it is!" Nixon seized an oar as if awakening from a dream. "Thank you for warning us! We don't want to be hung up in the pocket of this little creek — until it rises again!"

"Then pull for all you 're worth! Your boat — she 's a funny one," broke off the stranger with the ghost of a boyish twinkle in his eye; "she looks as if she was made from a flat-bottomed dory that had been cut in two!"

"So she was, I guess!" Leon too found his voice suddenly.

"Well! luckily for you, she does n't draw much water; you may scrape by an' get out into the open channel while there's tide enough left to float her!" And with an inarticulate grunt that might have been construed into some sort of

farewell, the stranger disappeared over the marshes abruptly as he had come.

Their own plight now engrossed the boys. It was clear that if they did not want to be pocketed in this out-of-the-way creek with their amphibious prize, grounded in the sand for the next five or six hours, without a hope of getting back to their camp on the dunes until the tide should rise again, they certainly must row for all they were worth!

Even as it was, the two older scouts, divesting themselves of shoes and stockings, rolling up their khaki trousers, had to "get out and shove" ere they could propel the flat-bottomed Pill through the mouth of the creek.

"If that fellow had n't warned us just in time, we 'd have been in a bad scrape," said Scout Chase. "We 're not out of the misery yet, Nix! See the old mud-shadow poking its nose up on either side of the main channel!"

"Yes, the water on those shallows looks like the inside of an oyster-shell, — thick and iridescent. 'Shove' is the word again, Starrie!" returned his toiling companion, arduously putting that watchword in practice, pushing the little boat containing Harold and the pup-seal (the latter being the only member of the party

"CAN'T YOU SEE THE TIDE IS LEAVING YOU?"

placidly unmoved by the situation) through the iridescent opaqueness of the ebbing ripples that now barely covered vast silvery stretches of tidal mud.

"Look at that old clam-digger, who has his shack on the white beach, about quarter of a mile from our camp! He 's left his boat behind and is wading out to the clam-flats." Nixon paused, with his breast to the boat's stern, in the act of propelling it. "Goody! I 'd like to stop and dig clams with him. But we 'd never get back to camp! What ho! she sticks again. There! that brings her."

By dint of alternately propelling and rowing the three scouts, with their prize, finally reached the white beach of the dunes before the tide completely deserted them. They brought a full cargo of excitement into camp in their tale of the stranger who had warned them; who, with worthless vagrancy stamped all over him, they felt must be the *vaurien*, Dave Baldwin; and in their engaging prize, the flippered pup-seal.

The latter quite eclipsed the interest felt in the former. Never was there a more docile, fatter, or more amiable puppy. He enjoyed being fondled in a scout's arms, under difficulties, as, for a pup, he was quite a heavy-weight and slip-

pery too, on account of the amount of blubber secreted under his creamy skin. His oily brown eyes were softly trustful.

But the tug-of-war came with feeding-time. Vainly did the boy scouts offer him of their best, vainly did Marcoo and Colin tramp a mile over the dunes to bring back a quart of new milk for him from the nearest farm, and try to pour it gently down his infant throat!

He set up a dove-like moaning that was plainly a call for his mother as he lay sprawled out on the white sands. And, at nightfall, by order of the scoutmaster, Scouts Warren and Chase rowed out into the channel and returned him to the water in which he was quite at home.

But he was possessed of a contradictory spirit, for he swam after the Pill, crying to be taken aboard again. They could hear his dulcet "Oo-oo-ooo!" as they gathered round their camp-fire in the white hollow among the sand-hills.

At the powwow to-night the encounter with Dave Baldwin, if the vagrant of the marshes was really he, came in for its share of discussion. Guesses were rife as to the probability of the scouts running across him again, and as to how he might occupy his time in the lazy vagabond life which he was leading.

It was here that Harold broke through the semi-shy reserve which still encrusted him and contributed a remark, the first as a result of his observations, to the powwow.

"Well! he had an *awful* sorry face on him," he said impulsively, alluding to the vagrant. "It just made me feel badly for a while!"

"You 're right, Greerie, he had!" corroborated Leon. "Whatever he 's doing, it is n't agreeing with him. We 'll probably come on him again some time on the marshes or among the dunes."

But eleven days went by, eleven full days for the scout campers, golden with congenial activity, wherein each hour brought its own interesting "stunt," as they called it; and they saw no more of the *vaurien*, the worthless one, who had caused his mother's heart to "break in pieces."

And they gave little thought to him. For those breezy days, the last of August and the first of September, were spent in observation tours over marsh and dune or on the heaving river, in playing their exciting scout games among the sandhills, in clam-bakes, in practising signaling with the little red-and-white flags according to the semaphore or wig-wag code — one scout transmitting a message to another posted on a

distant hill — and in the various duties assigned to them in pairs, of cooking, and keeping the camp generally in order.

The more fully one lives, the more joyously one adventures, the more quickly flutters the present into the past, like a sunny landscape flitting by a train! It had come to be the last night but one in camp. Within another two days the Sugar-loaf Dunes would be deserted so far as campers were concerned.

School would presently reopen. And at the end of the month the Owls would lose their brother and patrol leader: during the first days of October Scout Nixon Warren's parents were expected home from Europe, and he would rejoin his former troop in Philadelphia.

To-night, every one was bent upon making the end of the camping trip a season of befitting jollity. They sang their scout songs as they gathered round the camp-fire. They retailed the last good joke from their magazine. They challenged the darkness with their hearty motto, — both in the strong sweet mother tongue wherein it had been given to the world, and in the pretty *Estu preta!* form, which two of their number thought might serve as a universal link.

But the night refused to rejoice with them.

It was chilly, colder than on the same date one year ago when four lost boys camped out in the Bear's Den. The inflowing tide broke on the beach with sobbing clamor. There was no moon, few stars. The white sand-hills were wild-looking sable mounds waving blood-red plumes of beach-grass or beach-pea wherever the light of camp-fire or camp-lantern struck them.

The clusters of gray birches and ash-trees scattered here and there among the dunes cowered like ebony shadows fearful of the rising wind.

"Bah! De night she 's as black as one black crow," declared Toiney with a shrug as he threw another birch log on the camp-fire and set one of the two bright oil-lanterns on a sand-hill where it spied upon the gusty, secretive darkness like a watchful eye.

With the exception of a few small carbide lamps attached to tent-posts, those lanterns were the only luminaries in camp.

"An' de win' she commence for mak' noise lak' mad cat! Saint Ba'tiste! I 'll t'ink dis iss night for de come-backs — me." And Toiney glanced half-fearfully behind him at the sable mounds so milky in daylight.

"He means it 's a night for spooks — ghosts! He does n't believe much in 'come-backs,' though:

look at his face!" Leon pointed at the assistant scoutmaster's black eyes dancing in the firelight, at the tassel of his red cap capering in the breeze. "By the way, Nix and I saw one 'come-back,' about an hour ago — a human one!" went on Corporal Chase suddenly, after a minute's pause: "that rough customer, Dave Baldwin, as we suppose him to be, turned up again this evening near the summer bungalows away over on the beach. He was acting rather queerly, too!"

"He certainly was!" chimed in Nixon, looking thoughtfully at a little topknot of flame that sprouted upon the blazing log nearest to him as he lay, with his brother Owls, prone upon his face and hands, gazing into the fire.

"What was he doing?" asked Jesse Taber, a member of the Seal Patrol.

"Why, he was up on the high piazza of the largest bungalow — that house built just on the edge of the dunes which looks as if it was standing on stilts, and getting ready to walk off! He seemed to be trying one of the windows when we came along as if attempting to get in."

"The summer people who own that house left there this morning; we saw them going," broke in Godey Peck of the Fox Patrol. "I guess all the three houses are empty now; those dandified

'summer birds' don't like staying round here when the wind 'makes noise like mad cat'!" Godey hugged himself and beamed over the wild noises of the night, and at the voice of the tidal river calling lustily.

"Well! did he get into the house?" asked Jemmie Ahern of the Seals.

"No, as we came along over the dunes he saw us and scooted off!" Thus Corporal Leon Chase again took up the thread of the story. "But Nix an' I looked back as we walked along the beach; it was getting dusk then, but we made out his figure disappearing into a large shed belonging to that bungalow."

"I hope he was n't up to any mischief," said the scoutmaster gravely. "Now! let's forget about him. Have n't any of you other scouts some contribution to make to to-night's powwow about things you 've observed during the day?"

"Mr. Scoutmaster, I have!" Marcoo lifted his head upon the opposite side of the camp-fire where he lay, breast downward, on the sand. "Colin and I and two members of the Seal Patrol, Howsie and Jemmie Ahern, saw an *awfully* big heap of clam-shells between two sand-hills on the shore-edge of the beach. They were partly covered with sand; but we dug them out; and

— somehow — they looked as if they had been there for ages."

"Likely enough, they had! The Indians used to hold clam-bakes here." The firelight danced upon the scoutmaster's white teeth; he greatly enjoyed the camp-fire powwow. "You see, fellows, this fine, white sand is something like snow — but snow which does n't harden — the wind blows it into a drift; then, perhaps, another big gale comes along, picks up the drift and deposits it somewhere else. That 's what uncovered your clam-shells."

"Then how is it these white dunes are n't traveling round the country?" Colin waved his arm toward the neighboring sand-hills with a laugh.

"Because they are held in place by the vegetation that quickly sprang up on and between them. That beach-grass has very coarse strong roots which interlace under the surface. Now! let 's listen to Toiney singing; we must be merry, seeing it 's our second last night in camp." Scoutmaster Estey waved his hand toward his assistant in the blue shirt and tasseled cap.

Toiney, tiring of the conversation which it was an effort for him to follow, was crooning softly an old French ditty wherewith he had

been sung to sleep by his grandfather when he was a black-eyed babe in a saffron-hued night-cap and gown: —

> "À la clair-e fontain-e
> M'en allant promener,
> J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle,
> Que je m'y suis baigné!"

"Oh! you took a walk near the fountain and found the water so fine that you went in bathing!" cried one and another of the scouts who were in their first year in high school. "Must have been a pretty big fountain! Go ahead: what did you do next, Toiney?"

But the singer had suddenly sprung to his feet and stood, an alert, tense figure, in the flickering twilight.

"*Gard' donc!*" he cried gutturally, while the cat-like breeze capered round him, flicking his short red tassel, catching at his legs in their queer high boots. "*Gard' donc!* de littal light in de sky — engh? *Sapré tonnerre!* I 'll t'ink shee 's *fire*, me. No camp-fire, *non!* Beeg fire — engh? *V'là! V'là!*"

He glanced round sharply at his scout comrades, and pointed, with excited gesticulations, across the sable dunes in the direction of those recently erected summer residences.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIGNALMAN

"PATROL leaders and corporals, muster your men!" The voice of the young scoutmaster rang sharply out upon the night.

The three boy patrols, Owls, Seals, and Foxes, who fell quickly into line at his order, were no longer surrounding their camp-fire amid the dusky sand-hills. That had been deserted even while Toiney was speaking, while he was pointing out the claims of a larger fire on their attention.

From the glare in the sky this was evidently a threatening blaze; its fierce reflection overhung like an intangible flaming sword the trio of recently erected summer residences about quarter of a mile from the scouts' camp—those handsome bungalows from which the summer birds had flown.

"That 's no brush fire," Scoutmaster Estey had exclaimed directly he sighted the glare. "It 's a building of some kind. Come on, fellows; there 's work for us here!" And snatching one

of the two camp-lanterns from its sandy pedestal he led the way across the dark wilderness of the dunes.

Nixon caught up the second luminary and followed his chief. In their wake raced the three patrols, down in a sandy hollow one moment, climbing wildly the next, tearing their way through the plumed tangle of beach-grass and other vegetation that capped each pale mound now swathed in blackness, Toiney keeping Harold by his side.

"It is n't one of the houses, thank goodness! Only a big shed!" cried the scoutmaster as they neared the scene of the fire, where golden flames tore in two the darkness that cowered on either side of them, having gained complete mastery of an outbuilding which had been used as a modest garage during the summer.

"*Whee-ew!* Gracious!" Nixon vented a prolonged whistle of consternation. "Why! 't was into that very shed that we saw Dave Baldwin — or the man whom we took for him — disappear a couple of hours ago."

But the demands of the moment were such, if the three houses were to be saved, that the remark, tossed at random into the darkness, was lost there amid the reign of fiery motes and

rampant sparks that strove to carry the destruction farther.

"Luckily, the wind is n't setting toward the house — it 's mostly in another direction!" The scoutmaster by a breathless wave of his blinking lantern indicated the largest of the three bungalows to which the blazing outbuilding belonged. "No hope of saving that shed! But if the little wood-shed near-by catches, the house will go too. We may head the fire off!"

It was then that he issued the ringing order to patrol leaders and those second in command to muster their men.

And as the boy scouts fell into line, while Toiney was muttering, aghast: "Ah, *quel gros feu!* She 's beeg fire! How we put shes out — engh?" the alert brain of the American scoutmaster had outlined his plan of campaign; and the air cracked with his orders: —

"Toiney, take the Owls and break into that clam-digger's shack on the beach: get his pails! Foxes and Seals form a line to the beach; fill the pails as you get them an' pass 'em along to me! Tide 's high; you need only wade in a little way! Hey! Leon," — to Corporal Chase, who was obeying the first order with the rest of his patrol, — "you 're good at signaling: take these

lanterns, get up on the tallest sand-hill an' signal Annisquam Lighthouse; tell them to get help! Men there can probably read semaphore!"

"*We* may not be able to prevent the fire's spreading. And if it attacks that bungalow, the others will go too — the whole colony! Lighthouse men may take the glare in the sky to mean only a brush-fire," added the scoutmaster, *sotto voce*, as he stationed himself upon the crest of the sandy slope that led from the burning shed to the dim lapping water.

That doomed shed was now blazing like a mammoth bonfire. The flames flung their gleeful arms out, seizing a solemn gray birch-tree for a partner in their wild dance, scattering their rosy fire-petals broadcast until they lodged in the roof of the wood-shed adjacent to the house, and upon the piazza of the bungalow itself.

But they had a trained force to reckon with in the boy scouts. In the clam-digger's shack were found more than a dozen pails which their owner had cleaned and set in order before he went home that evening. And among the excited raiders who seized upon them with wild eagerness was Harold Greer — Harold who a year ago was called "poltron" and "scaree" even by the friend who protected him — Harold, with the

last wisp of bugbear fear that trammeled him burned off by the contagious excitement of the moment — acquitting himself sturdily as a Scout of the U.S.A!

Under his patrol leader's direction he took his place in the chain of boys that formed from the conflagration to the wave-edge of the beach, where half a dozen of his comrades rushed bare-legged into the howling tide, filled the pails and passed them along, up the line, to their scoutmaster on the hill.

And he held to his place and to his duty stanchly, did the one-time "poltron," even when Toiney, his mainstay, was summoned to the hilltop, to aid the commander-in-chief in his direct onslaughts upon the fire. Seeing which, Scout Warren touched his shoulder once proudly, in passing, and said in a voice huskily triumphant: "Well done, Harold! I always knew you were a boy!"

The dragon which had held sway upon that woodland clearing was slain at last, and the scars which he had left upon his victim were being cauterized by the fire.

"Go to it, boys! Good work! That's fine!" rang out the commanding shout of the scoutmaster above the sullen roar of semi-defeated flames and the hiss of contending elements.

"*Houp-là! Ça c'est bien!* Dat 's ver' good!" screamed Toiney airily from his perch atop of a ladder which he had found in the wood-shed.

From this vantage-point he was deluging with salt water the roof of the smaller shed and also the walls of the bungalow wherever a fire-seed lodged, ready to take root. Like a huge monkey he looked, swarming up there, with the flame-light dancing deliriously upon his dingy red cap! But his voice would put merriment into any exigency.

"*Houp-e-là!* We arre de boy! We arre de bes' scout ev'ry tam'!" he carolled gayly, as he launched his hissing pailfuls at each threatened spot. "*Continue cette affaire d'eau* — go on wit' dis watere bizness. We done good work — engh?"

So they were, doing very good work! But the issue was still exceedingly doubtful as to whether, without any proper fire-fighting apparatus, they could hold the flames in check, restricting their destruction to the large shed whose roof toppled in with a resounding crash, and a volcano-like eruption of sparks.

And what of Leon? What of Corporal Chase, alone upon the tallest sand-hill he could pick

out, a solitary scout figure remote from his comrades with the dune breeze shrieking round him?

What were his feelings as he shook his two bright signaling lanterns aloft at arm's length, to attract the attention of the men who kept the distant lighthouse beyond the dunes at the mouth of another tidal river, and then spelled out his message with those flashing luminaries, instead of the ordinary signal-flags: "Fire! Get help! House afire! Get help!" calling assistance out of the black night?

Well! Starrie Chase was conscious of a monster thrill shooting through him to his feet which firmly pressed the sandy soil: breaking up into a hundred little thrills, it made most of the sensations which he had misnamed excitement a year ago seem tame, thin, and unboyish.

He stood there, an isolated, sixteen-year-old boy. But he knew himself a trained force stronger than the "mad-cat" wind that clawed at him, than the tide which moaned behind him, even than the fire he combated; stronger always in the long run than these, for he was growing into a man who could get the better of them ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

He was a scout, in line with the world's pro-

gress, allied with rescue, not ruin, with healing, not harm, with a chivalry that crowned all.

"Fire! Get help!" Thus he kept on signaling at intervals, his left arm extending one flashing lantern at arm's length, while the companion light was lowered to his knees for the formation of the first letter of the message. And so on, the twin lights held at various angles illumining the youthful signalman until he stood out like a black statue on a pedestal among the lonely dunes.

To Starrie Chase that sand-peak pedestal seemed to grow into a mountain and his uniformed figure to tower with it — become colossal — in the excitement of the moment!

While, not twenty yards distant, behind a smaller sand-hillock, crouched another figure whose half-liberated groan the wind caught and tossed away like a feather as he gazed between clumps of beach-grass at the gesturing form of the scout.

It was the same figure which had haunted the dunes, listening to the camp-fire revelry upon the boy scouts' first night in camp, the same which had so suddenly appeared upon the marshes near the pup-seal's creek.

But distress seemed now to lie heavier upon

that vagrant figure, instead of diminishing. For, as he still studied the light-girdled form of the signalman, Dave Baldwin vented a groan full and unmistakable, and blew upon a pair of burned hands.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOG SHANTY AGAIN

"This fire has been the work of some incendiary — that 's what I think!" was the opinion delivered later that night by the captain of the nearest fire-brigade, who, with his company, had been summoned by Leon's signaled message, passed on via telephone wires by the lighthouse men.

"Of course, it may have been a case of accident or spontaneous combustion, but the former seems out of the question, seeing that the houses were empty, and the latter not probable," went on the grizzled chief. "Anyhow, I congratulate you on your boys, Mr. Scoutmaster! Under your leadership they certainly did good work in saving this whole summer colony."

"So they did; I 'm proud of them!" returned the scoutmaster impulsively, which made the three patrol leaders within hearing, Scout Warren of the Owls, Godey Peck of the Foxes, and Jesse Taber of the Seals, straighten their tired bodies, feeling repaid.

"Well! I expect you 'll see one or two officers landing upon these Sugarloaf Dunes tomorrow, to try and get at the cause of the fire," said the chief again. "It started in that shed where, so far as we know, there was nothing inflammable."

"I ought to tell you," Scoutmaster Estey looked very grave, "that two of my scouts saw a man entering the shed," pointing to what was now a mere smouldering heap of ashes, "just about an hour, or a little over, before the fire broke out. When they first caught sight of him he was on the piazza of the bungalow itself, and seemed trying to get into the house."

"Ho! Ho! I thought so. This is a case for the district police, I guess!" muttered the grizzled fire-chief.

That was the opinion also of the police representatives who landed upon the white dunes from a motor-boat early the next morning. And when the sharp questioning of one of the officers brought out the fact that the individual who had lurked about the scene of the fire was believed to be a youthful ne'er-do-weel, Dave Baldwin, with a prison record behind him, whose name was known to the two policemen, though his person was not, suspicion fastened upon that

vagrant as possibly the malicious author of the fire.

"That fellow first got into trouble through a morbid craving for excitement," said one of the officers. "The same craving *may* have led him on from one thing to another until he has n't stopped at arson — especially if he had a spiteful motive for it, which is likely with a tramp. That may have been his purpose in trying to enter the house."

"I can scarcely imagine Dave's having become such an utter degenerate," answered the scoutmaster sadly. "I went to school with him long ago. And Captain Andy Davis knew his father well; they were shipmates on more than one trawling trip to the Grand Banks. Captain Andy speaks of the elder David Baldwin as a brave man and a big fisherman. Even if the son did start this fire, it may have been accidental in some way."

"Well! we must get our hands on him, anyhow," decided the officer. "I wonder if he 's skulking round among the dunes still; that 's not probable? I 'd like to know whether any one of these observant boy scouts of yours saw a boat leave this shore since daybreak?"

It transpired that Coombsie had: after a night

of unprecedented excitement — like his tossing brother scouts who sought the shelter of their tents about one o'clock in the morning — he had been unable to sleep, had crept out of his tent at daybreak and climbed a white sand-hill, to watch the sun rise over the river.

"I saw a rowboat shoot out of a little creek farther up the river, I should say about half a mile from the dunes," said Marcoo. "There was only one person in it; seemed to me he was acting rather queerly; he 'd row for a while, then stand up in the stern and scull a bit, then row again."

"Could you see for what point he was heading?"

"For the salt-marshes high up on the other side of the river, I guess! I think he landed there."

"Then, he 's probably hiding in the woods beyond the marshes. We must search them. That French-Canadian, Toiney Leduc, who 's camping with you, has worked as a lumberman in those woods; he knows them well, and is a good trailer. I 'd like to have him for a guide this morning." Here the officer turned to the scoutmaster. "And if you have no objection I think it would be well that those two boys should come with

us," he nodded toward Scouts Warren and Chase. "They can identify the man whom they saw trying to enter that bungalow last night."

There is nothing at all inspiriting about a man-hunt; so Nixon and Leon decided when, within an hour, they landed from the police boat on the familiar salt-marshes high up the river, and silently took their way across them, in company with Toiney and the policemen, over the uplands into the woods.

They had come upon the fugitive's boat, hidden among a clump of bushes near the river. Using that as a starting-point, Toiney followed Dave Baldwin's trail into the maze of woodland; though how he did so was to the boy scouts a problem, for to them it seemed blind work.

But the guide in the tasseled cap, blue shirt, and heelless high boots, would stop now and again at a soft spot on the marshes or uplands, or when they came to a swampy patch in the woods; at such times he would generally drop on all fours with a muttered: "Ha! *V'là ses pis!*" in his queer patois. "Dere 's heem step!" And anon: "Dere me fin his feets again!"

When there was no footprint to guide him Toiney would stoop down and read the story of the dry pine-needles, just faintly disturbed by

the toe of a rough boot which had kicked them aside a little in passing.

Or he would carefully examine a broken twig, the wood of which, being whitish and not discolored, showed that it had been recently snapped by a tread heavier than that of a fox; and again they would hear him mutter in his quaint dialect: "*Tiens! le tzit ramille cassé:* de littal stick broke! I'll t'ink hees step jus' here — engh?"

It was a lesson in trailing which the two boy scouts never forgot as they took their way through the thick woods, fairly well known to them now, past Varney's Paintpot, Rattlesnake Brook, and other points of interest.

Ere they reached the Bear's Den, however, the trail which Toiney had been following seemed to turn off at an angle and then double backward through the woods, in an opposite direction to that in which they had been pursuing it.

"Mebbe she's no' de same trail?" pondered the guide aloud. "Mebbe dere's oder man's feets, engh?"

It was now that a sudden idea, a swift memory, struck Scout Warren.

"Say! Starrie," he exclaimed in a low tone to his brother scout. "Do you remember our look-

ing all over that loggers' camp last year, the shanty back there in the woods, with the rusty grindstone trough and mountain of sawdust beside it? We found some fresh tobacco ash on the table and in one of the bunks which showed that, though the shanty was deserted in summer, somebody was using it for a shelter at night. That somebody may have been Dave Baldwin."

"Yes, they say he has spent his time — or most of it — loafing among the dunes or in the woods," returned Leon, well recalling the incident and how, too, he had scoffed at the boy scout for taking the trouble to read the sign story told by every article in and about the rough shanty, including the overturned trough.

"Eh! what's that, boys?" asked one of the two policemen, catching part of the conversation.

As in duty bound they told him; and the search party turned in the direction of the log shanty.

As they surmised it was not empty. On the discolored mattress in the lower bunk left there by the lumbermen who once occupied it, was stretched the figure of a man, fast asleep. One foot emerging from a charred, torn trouser-leg which looked as if it had come into contact with fire, hung over the edge of the deal crib.

When the party filed into the shanty the sleeper started up and rubbed his eyes. At sight of the two policemen his smudged face took on a pinched pallor.

"I did n't do it on purpose!" he cried in the bewilderment of this sudden awakening, without time to collect his senses. "So help me! I never meant to set that shed on fire!"

"You were seen hanging round there an hour before the blaze broke out, and trying to get into the house too," challenged the elder of the policemen.

Dave Baldwin slipped from the bunk to the ground; he saw that his best course lay in making a clean breast of last night's proceedings.

"So I was!" he said. "And these two fellows," he pointed to the boy scouts, "saw me up on the piazza of the house, trying a window. I was hungry; I 'd had nothing to eat all day but the last leg of a woodchuck that I knocked on the head day before yesterday. I thought the summer people who had just gone away might have left some canned stuff or remnants o' food behind 'em. I did n't want to steal anything else, or to do mischief!" he went on with that same passionate frankness of a man abruptly startled out of sleep, while the policemen listened patiently. "I

did n't, I tell ye! I 'd been hangin' round those Sugarloaf Dunes for nigh on two weeks, watching the boys who were camping there, having a ripping good time — doing a lot o' stunts that I knew nothing about — wishing I 'd had the chanst they have now!"

"How came you to go into the shed that was burned down?" asked one of the officers.

"I was hungry, as I tell you, an' I could n't get into the house, so I thought I'd lie down under the nearest cover, that shed, go to sleep an' forget it. I guess I knocked the ashes out o' my pipe an' dozed. Smoke an' the smell o' wood burning woke me. I found one side o' the shed was on fire. Maybe, some one had left an oily rag, or one with turpentine on it, around, and the spark from my pipe caught it. I don't know! I tried to stamp out the fire — to beat it out with my hands!" He extended blistered palms and knuckles. "I 've made a mess o' my life I know! But I ain't a crazy fire-bug!"

"Why did n't you try and get help to fight it?"

"I was too scared. I thought, likely as not, nobody would believe me, seeing I had a 'reformatory record,'" the youthful vagrant's face twitched. "I was afraid o' being 'sent up'

again, so I hid among the dunes and crossed to the woods this morning."

"Well, you can tell all that to the judge; you must come with me now," said the older policeman inflexibly, not unkindly; he knew that men when suddenly aroused from sleep usually speak the truth; he was impressed by the argument of those blistered palms; on the other hand, the youthful vagrant's past record was very much against him.

But those charred palms were evidence enough for Toiney; though they might leave the officers of the law unconvinced.

"Ha! *courage*, Dave," he cried, feeling an emotion of pity mingle with the contempt which he, honest Antoine, had felt for the *vaurien* who had caused his old mother's heart to burst. "*Bon courage*, Dave! I 'll no t'ink you do dat, for sure, me. Mebbe littal fire fly f'om you' pipe. I 'll no t'ink you do dat for de fun!"

"We don't think you did it on purpose, Dave," struck in the two boy scouts, seconding their guide.

Nevertheless, Dave Baldwin passed that night in a prison cell and appeared before the judge next morning with the certainty confronting him that he would be remanded to appear before the

higher court on the grave charge of being an incendiary.

And it seemed improbable that bail would be offered for the prisoner, so that he would be allowed out of jail in the mean time.

Yet bail was forthcoming. A massive, weather-beaten figure, well known in this part of Essex County, stood up in court declaring that he was ready and willing to sign the prisoner's bail bonds. It was Captain Andy Davis.

And when all formalities had been gone through, when the prisoner was liberated until such time as his case should come up for trial, Captain Andy took him in tow.

"You come along home with me, Dave!" he commanded. "I'm going to put it up to you straight whether you want to live a man's life, or not."

And so he did that evening.

"I've been wanting to get hold of you for some time, Dave Baldwin," said the sea-captain. "Your father an' I were shipmates together on more 'n one trip. He was a white man, brave an' hard-working; it's hard for me to believe that there is n't some o' the same stuff in his son."

The youthful ne'er-do-weel was silent. Captain Andy slowly went on:—

"As for the matter of this fire, I don't believe you started it on purpose. I doubt if the policemen who arrested you do! It 's your past record that 's against you. Now! if I see the district attorney, Dave Baldwin," Captain Andy's eyes narrowed meditatively under the heavy lids, "and succeed in getting this case against you *nol prossed* — I guess that's the term the lawyer used — it means squashed, anyhow, do you want to start over again an' head for some port worth while?"

"Nobody would give me the chance," muttered the younger man huskily.

"I will. I've bought a piece of land over there on the edge of the woods, lad; it ain't more 'n half cleared yet. I'm intending to start a farm. But I don't know much about farming; that 's the truth!" The grand old Viking looked almost pathetically helpless. "But you 've worked on a farm, Dave, when you were a boy and since: if you want to take hold an' help me — if you want to stick to work an' make good — this is your chance!"

An inarticulate sound from the *vaurien;* it sounded like a sob bitten in two by clenched teeth!

"The two boys who were with the officers who

arrested you told me that you declared you'd been hangin' round the Sugarloaf Dunes lately, watching those scouts at their signaling stunts an' the like, an' wishing that you'd had the chance they have now, when you were a boy. Well! *theirs* is a splendid chance — better than boys ever had before, it seems to me — of joining the learning o' useful things with fun." Captain Andy planted an elbow emphatically upon a little table near him. "Now! Dave, you don't want to let those boy scouts be the ones to do the good turns for your old mother that you should do? If you ain't set on breaking her heart altogether — if you want to be a decent citizen of the country that raises boys like these scouts — if you want to see your own sons scouts some day — well, give us your fin, lad!"

The captain's voice dropped upon the last words, the semi-comical wind-up of a peroration broken and blustering in its earnestness.

There was a repetition of the hysterical sound in Dave Baldwin's throat which failed to pass his gritting teeth. He did not extend his hand at Captain Andy's invitation. But his shoulders heaved as he turned his head away; and the would-be benefactor was satisfied.

"And so Captain Andy is going to stand back of Dave Baldwin and give him another chance to make good in life!" said the Exmouth doctor, member of the Local Council of Boy Scouts, when he heard what had come of the vagrant's arrest. "That's like Andy! And I don't think he'll have much difficulty with the district attorney; nobody really believes that Baldwin started that fire maliciously, and the district attorney will be very ready to listen to anything Captain Andy has to say!"

Here the doctor's eye watered. He was recalling an incident which had occurred some years before at sea, when the son of that district attorney, who did not then occupy his present distinguished position, and the doctor's own son, with one or two other young men of Dave Baldwin's age, had been wrecked while yachting upon certain ragged rocks of Newfoundland, owing to their foolhardiness in putting to sea when a storm was brewing.

At daybreak upon an October morning their buffeted figures were sighted, clinging to the rocks, by the lookout on the able fishing vessel, Constellation, of which Captain Andrew Davis was then in command.

The furious gale had subsided. But as Cap-

tain Andy knew, the greatest danger to his own vessel lay in the sullen and terrible swell of the "old sea" which it had stirred up.

Nevertheless, the Constellation bore down upon the shipwrecked men, getting as near to them as possible, without being swept on to the rocks herself.

Then Captain Andy gave the order to put over a dory, stepped into it, and called for a volunteer. Twice, to and fro through the towering swell of the old sea, went that gallant little dory. She was smashed to kindling wood on her second trip, but not before the men in her could be hauled aboard the Constellation with ropes — not before every member of the yachting party was saved!

"And I guess if Captain Andy wants a chance to haul Dave Baldwin off the rocks where the old sea stirred up by the gusts of his own waywardness and wrongdoing have stranded him, the district attorney won't stand in the way!" said the doctor to himself.

His surmise proved correct.

It was just one month after the fire upon the dunes that the three patrols of boy scouts, Owls, Foxes, and Seals, assembled at a point of rendez-

vous upon the outskirts of the town, bound off upon a long Saturday hike through the October woods.

But some hearts in the troop were at bottom heavy to-day, though on the surface they rose above the feeling.

For it was the last woodland hike, for the present, that Scout Warren of the Owls would take with his patrol. The return of his parents from Europe was expected during the coming week; and he — now with two white stripes upon his arm, signifying his two years of service in the Boy Scouts of America, wearing also the patrol leader's bars and first-class scout badge — would rejoin his Peewit Patrol in Philadelphia.

However, his comrades' regrets were softened by Nixon's promise that he would frequently visit the Massachusetts troop with which he had spent an exciting year, and which, unintentionally, he had been instrumental in forming.

And on this brilliant October Saturday Assistant Scoutmaster Toiney Leduc, perceiving that the coming parting was casting a faint shadow before, exerted himself to banish that cloudlet as the troop started on its hike.

"*Houp-e-là!* We arre de boy! We arre de stuff! We arre de bes' scout ev'ry tam'!" he

shouted with an *esprit de corps* which found its echo in one breast at least — that of the terrier, Blink, who to-day capered with the troop as its mascot. "We arre de bes' scout; *n'est-ce pas*, mo' smarty?" And Toiney embraced Harold, marching at his side — Harold, whose lips turned up to-day and every day now in the scout's smile, for since the night of the dune fire had not each of his comrades and the scoutmasters too, kept impressing on him that he had "behaved like a little man and a good scout" at duty's call!

There were individuals among the onlookers, too, watching the three patrols march out of the town that morning, who shared Toiney's primitive conceit that they were the "best scouts"; or at least fairly on the way to being a model troop.

Little Jack Baldwin, gazing at his rescuers, Scouts Warren and Chase, Marcoo and Colin Estey, marching two and two at the head of the leading patrol, clapped his hands and almost burst his heart in wishing that he could be twelve years old to-morrow so that he might enlist as a tenderfoot scout.

Whereupon his old grandmother smilingly bade him "take patience," for the two years

which now separated him from his heart's desire would not be long in passing.

And the boy scouts, as they raised their broad-brimmed hats to old Ma'am Baldwin, saw a happier look upon her face than it had ever worn before, to their knowledge.

Farther on they came upon the explanation of this! They were taking a different route to-day from that which they usually followed in entering the woods. About a mile from the town they struck a partial clearing, where the land, not yet entirely relieved of timber, was evidently being gradually converted into a farm.

As the scouts approached they heard the ringing strokes of a woodsman's axe, and presently came upon a perspiring young man, putting all his strength into felling a stubborn oak-tree.

"Hullo, Dave; how goes it?" cried the scoutmaster, halting with his troop.

"Fine!" came back the panting answer from the individual engaged in this scouting or pioneering work, who was the former *vaurien*, Dave Baldwin.

"Find this better than loafing about the dunes, eh?"

"Well! I should say so," came the answer with an honest smile.

But the boy scouts were hardly noticing Dave Baldwin: Owls, Foxes, and Seals, they were gazing in transfixed amusement at their hero-in-chief, Captain Andy, owner of this half-cleared land.

He, who in his seagoing days had been known by such flattering titles as the Grand Bank Horse, the Ocean Patrol, and the like, was seated in the midst of a half-acre of pasture land, holding on like grim death to one end of a twenty-foot rope coiled round his hand, the hemp's other extremity being hitched to the leg of a very lively red cow which presently dragged him the entire length of the pasture and then across and across it, in obedience to her feminine whims.

"She 'll be the death o' me, boys!" he shouted comically to the convulsed scouts. "Great Neptune! I 'd rather take a vessel through the breakers on Sable Island Bar than to be tied to her heels for one day."

"For pity's sake! Hold on to her, Cap!" Dave Baldwin paused in his energetic tree-felling. "Yesterday, she got into that little plowed field that I 'd just seeded down with winter rye, and thrashed about there!"

"Ha! I 'll t'ink you go for be good *habitant* — farmer — Dave," broke in Toiney suddenly

and genially. "I 'll t'ink you get dere after de w'ile, engh?"

It was plain to each member of the troop that so far as Dave himself was concerned he was already "getting there," — reaching the goal of an honest, industrious manhood.

The triple responsibility of starting a farm, directing the energies of his benefactor, and combating the cow, was rapidly making a man of him.

They heard the virile blows of his axe against the tree-trunk as they marched on their woodland way. And their song floated back to him: —

"At duty's call, with a smile for all,
The Scout will do his part!"

Dave Baldwin paused for a minute to listen; then, as he swung his axe in a tremendous, final blow against the tottering oak, he too broke triumphantly into the refrain: —

"And we 'll shout, shout, shout,
For the Scout, Scout, Scout,
For the Scouts of the U.S.A!"

THE END

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